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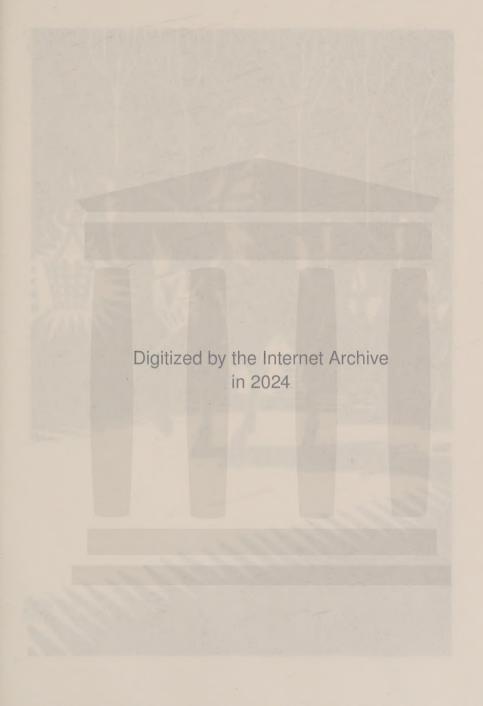
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# THE SECRET SHARER AND OTHER STORIES







## M JOSEPH CONRAD

## The Secret Sharer

and Other Stories

'TWIXT LAND AND SEA and TALES OF HEARSAY

Illustrations by Francis Mosley
Introduction by Jeremy Harding

The Secret Sharer and Other Stories combines two, originally separate, volumes of Conrad's short stories.

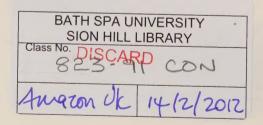
'Twixt Land and Sea, comprising 'A Smile of Fortune', 'The Secret Sharer' and 'Freya of the Seven Isles', was first published by J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd in 1912. The present text follows that of the Heinemann Collected Works of Joseph Conrad, Volume Twelve, published in 1921, with minor emendations. The Author's Note follows the text of that edition.

Tales of Hearsay, comprising 'The Warrior's Soul', 'Prince Roman', 'The Tale' and 'The Black Mate', was first published by T. Fisher Unwin Ltd in 1925, after Conrad's death in 1924. The present text follows that edition, with minor emendations. It does not include the original Preface by R. B. Cunninghame Graham.

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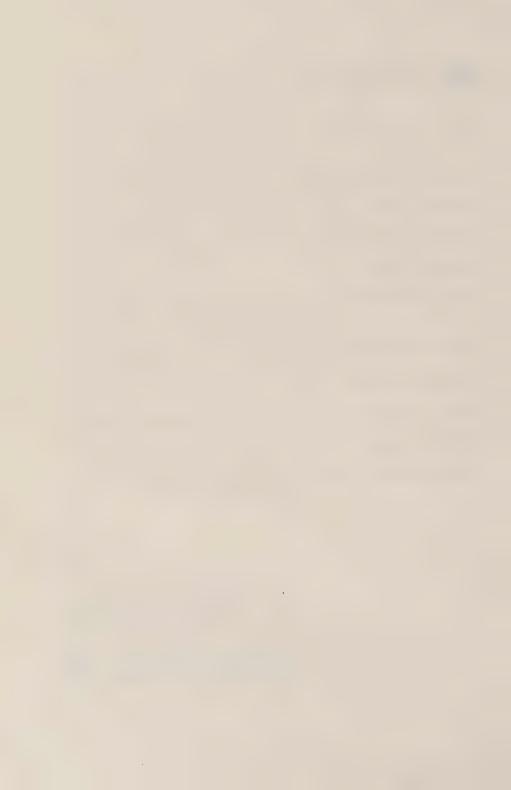
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#### **SINTRODUCTION**

Two months before his death in 1924, Joseph Conrad turned down the offer of a knighthood. Perhaps he felt a wistful loyalty to Poland, his country of origin, tugging at his conscience. Or perhaps at the end of his life he had come to believe that it was wrong for a writer to accept official honours from any government. His friend John Galsworthy had declined a knighthood on similar grounds. Conrad may have become an Englishman, but he remained a complicated person.

Notions of Englishness—and by extension Empire itself—recur throughout this collection of stories. They are there, subliminally, in 'The Black Mate', with its onshore scenes in the Port of London, and its central figure, Bunter, whose mixture of guile and forbearance proves an admirable reaction to adversity. Unlike his miserable captain from Leytonstone, who has fallen short of the mark, Bunter is the ideal English stalwart. In 'Freya of the Seven Isles', Jasper Allen, master of the *Bonito*, is admirably English in a different way, a paragon of daring and steadfastness. He is also fatally innocent—too frank and upstanding to recognise a bad intention, and helpless against the man who plots his ruin. Conrad was a very partial referee of national character. A dubious quality in others (Bunter's ability to deceive, Jasper's happy-go-lucky air) quickly became a virtue in an Englishman.

Yet if England and Empire were the embodiment of virtue, Conrad admired them even more for what they were not. What they were not, above all, was Russia. Conrad was born in the Polish Ukraine in 1857. He was nearly four when his father was detained by the Russian authorities and jailed in Warsaw. The arrest came thirty years after the Polish uprising described in another story here, 'Prince Roman'. The nationalist revolt of 1831 was a very costly failure. It created a florid Polish refugee élite in the capitals of Western Europe and left the remains of the movement divided. By 1860, when Conrad's father became seriously involved in nationalist politics, there was a renewed impatience for Polish freedom which culminated in another defeat, in 1863. By then, Conrad and his parents had been exiled to Vologda—'a great three-verst marsh', as Conrad's father called it—where the health and spirits of the family went into dark decline. His mother died in Russia in 1865. In 1868 he and his father were released from exile and settled in

Austrian Poland. His father died in Cracow the following year, leaving him in the care of his uncle.

When Conrad set out for Marseilles in 1874 with the intention of becoming a seaman, he was not quite seventeen. Yet already the weight of his early youth bore down on him. As a Pole with a proper knowledge of his country's history, he felt that weight very largely as the imposition of a foreign imperial power on the lives of people he knew and those he had heard about—a feeling massively reinforced by the experience of the family's exile. He retained a lifelong dislike for autocracy and a hatred of Russia, which stood, in his mind, for the worst kinds of obscurantism, brutality and political backwardness. When Prince Roman is condemned to the Siberian mines, Conrad has Tsar Nicholas scribble on the dossier: 'The authorities are severely warned to take care that this convict walks in chains like any other criminal every step of the way.'

There's no doubt that Conrad had a rosy view of the British imperium by contrast: it was nearly always enlightened, rarely cruel or high-handed, and at its heart lay certain cherished principles to do with respect for the individual and the freedoms of others. Millions of imperial subjects might have disagreed, but that was not the point: Britain was the antithesis of everything Conrad held in contempt, or believed to be wrong with the international political order. And at the time he began writing, at the end of the 1880s, he was scarcely leading a sheltered life. He had spent fifteen years at sea, with five more to come, and he had met an extraordinary range of people, both on board ship and in ports from the coasts of South America to the Malay Archipelago.

In 1905, he published a magazine essay, 'Autocracy and War', which cast a withering eye on Napoleon, as the awful and logical outcome of French revolutionary zeal. The Emperor was often represented as an eagle, Conrad wrote, but was 'in truth, more like a sort of vulture preying upon the body of a Europe which did, indeed, for some dozens of years, very much resemble a corpse'. Conrad blamed Napoleon for forcing other regimes into 'reaction'... tyranny and injustice' and for stirring up 'national hatreds'. So here is another moral and political foe, to be set against the virtues of the British and, as it happened, against their military might. But something about Napoleon arouses more than mere condemnation in Conrad: the Emperor is a grand character with a heroic sense of purpose, besides which he is French—preferable

by far to a Russian, even though, as a soldier, he brought war and destruction to Poland. Conrad was intrigued by the characters who most appalled him and it's in the nature of his complexity that his national stereotypes and bêtes noires seldom land him in trouble. He nearly always rescues himself from his narrower instincts and has no need of our condescension for doing so. Even so, aspects of 'Prince Roman' and 'The Warrior's Soul' are worth remarking because they make it so difficult to dismiss Conrad's politics as those of a resentful *émigré* Pole.

When Prince Roman rides across the family estate and sees the first evidence of the Polish uprising, he turns off to a village where the inn-keeper tells him that 'All the landowners great and small are out in arms, and even the common people have risen.' The significance of the exchange lies in the identity of Roman's informant: '... the Jew Yankel, innkeeper and tenant of all the mills on the estate, was a Polish patriot'. Conrad was not above the anti-Semitism of his Polish contemporaries, but he was ready to cut against the grain of his own prejudice and establish common cause between Jew and non-Jew.

True, the idea of Polish-Jewish solidarity suits Conrad's theme—'Prince Roman' is about the ruthlessness of Tsarism in the face of national struggles that threaten the integrity of empire—but in 'The Warrior's Soul', which humanises both the Russians and the French, there is no stealthy grinding of axes. The story, one of his last and most dramatic, is set during the French retreat from Moscow and told with great sympathy not only for the remains of Napoleon's regiments, but for the beleaguered Russians, following through on the ravages of winter. It begins with a chastening image of war, as a squadron of Russian cavalry charges an incapable mass of nearly extinct soldiers: "This was the first occasion then that I and my comrades had a close view of Napoleon's Grand Army," the narrator explains.

'It was an amazing and terrible sight. I had heard of it from others; I had seen the stragglers from it... But this was the very column itself! A crawling, stumbling, starved, half-demented mob... We rode into it at a trot, which was the most we could get out of our horses, and we stuck in that human mass as if in a moving bog.'

One of the Russian subalterns, Tomassov, sheathes his sword in the middle of the carnage, and Conrad freezes the frame, taking us back

beyond this still centre in the flurry of brutality to a crucial encounter in

Paris some years earlier that underpins the story.

R. B. Cunninghame Graham, a writer well to the left of Conrad, saw the story as evidence of his friend's civilising imagination and heaped the highest praises on it in his Preface (not reprinted here) to Tales of Hearsay (which also included 'Prince Roman'). In 'The Warrior's Soul', he argued, Conrad 'rises above nationality. Even his hatred of the hereditary tyrants of his country'—the Russians—'is forgotten. He sees them with their country laid waste and invaded by the Napoleonic hordes . . . what they were passing through, gives them his sympathy.' These remarks appeared within a year of Conrad's death—Tales of Hearsay was published in 1925—and read like an elegy. To write 'The Warrior's Soul', Cunninghame Graham suggested finally, was 'no light thing for a Pole to do . . . for it wants genius to feel for the oppressor in his hour of need. To feel for the oppressed, that we can all do easily enough.'

The present volume brings together *Tales of Hearsay* and another original collection, *'Twixt Land and Sea*, published much earlier, in 1912. Between them, these seven tales span Conrad's writing life: 'The Black Mate' is the earliest, and was begun, according to Cunninghame Graham, at around the time of Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, which he was drafting by 1889. 'The Warrior's Soul' and 'The Tale'—about a young World War I naval officer who makes a vexed life-and-death decision—both appeared in magazines in 1917. 'Twixt Land and Sea comprised the three longest stories here: 'A Smile of Fortune', 'The Secret Sharer' and 'Freya of the Seven Isles', which take us beyond Conrad's land-locked obsessions (the Polish national question, the Russian political character, Napoleonic arrogance) and out into open waters.

Conrad knew the Eastern Seas, and their hectic, imposing harbours, much better than he knew the Atlantic. He had sailed for Australia in 1878 (he was nearly twenty-one) and again in 1880. Not long afterwards, the *Palestine*, on which he was serving as second mate, sank off Sumatra. But the longer sea-stories in this volume draw directly on his two years' sailing to and from the Malay Archipelago, and also to Australia, in 1887 and '88 as a first mate on the *Vidar* and then as captain of the *Otago*, an iron three-master, of which he assumed command in

Bangkok in January 1888.

'Freya of the Seven Isles' is a transposition of Conrad's European

themes to the East: a story of blameless love undone by a grotesque Dutch naval officer who relies on the abuse of his power—and Dutch imperial power was already an abuse in Conrad's eyes—in order to achieve his ends. 'Freya' is a shipwreck romance. The lives of the devoted lovers, Freya and Jasper, are broken by the jealousy of a lesser man, a 'beetle', as they think of him, whose primitive interest in Freya burrows up into the light of day and destroys them.

Conrad said in 1920 that he was 'considerably abused' for publishing the story 'on the grounds of its cruelty'. But 'A Smile of Fortune' is not much kinder. It is set on Mauritius, which Conrad knew at first hand: he had spent a few weeks on the island—the 'Pearl of the Ocean'—before making for Melbourne, where he resigned his command of the *Otago* in 1889. 'A Smile of Fortune' is, as he says, a 'harbour story'. On land, the nuances of human relationships are not always brought out into the open by the elements, as they are at sea. The narrator, a young captain, falls prey to a subtly compromising mixture of sexual desire and commercial pressure. In the process he betrays a young mulatta sequestered by her father, first by giving rein to his infatuation with her and then by recoiling from her. Above all, Conrad would have argued, the narrator betrays himself. This is a bitter, understated story about the allencompassing nature of trade and the naïvety of a man who imagines himself above or beyond it.

"The Secret Sharer', the most famous of the stories in this edition, takes a real incident—the killing of an ordinary seaman by the chief mate of the Cutty Sark in 1880—and turns it into a meditation on force of circumstance and moral choice. Shortly after the events on the Cutty Sark, the ship's captain, who later committed suicide, let his chief mate slip away near the coast of Java. When the case finally came to trial, the judge directed a verdict of manslaughter: it was clear that the mate had acted under extreme provocation. In 'The Secret Sharer', Conrad uses the extenuating factors in the crime and the moral dilemma faced by the captain of the Cutty Sark to fashion a tense, dramatic tale about a young man who must decide what to do when he allows a fugitive on to his ship—his first command—only to discover that the man in question has killed a subordinate, and then to realise that anyone in his place might have done the same. The simplicity of the plot and the blow-by-blow description of the captain's agonising predicament work greatly in the story's favour. The closing scene, in which he puts the

ship at risk, in front of an incredulous, despairing crew who know nothing of the stranger on board, is one of Conrad's great set pieces.

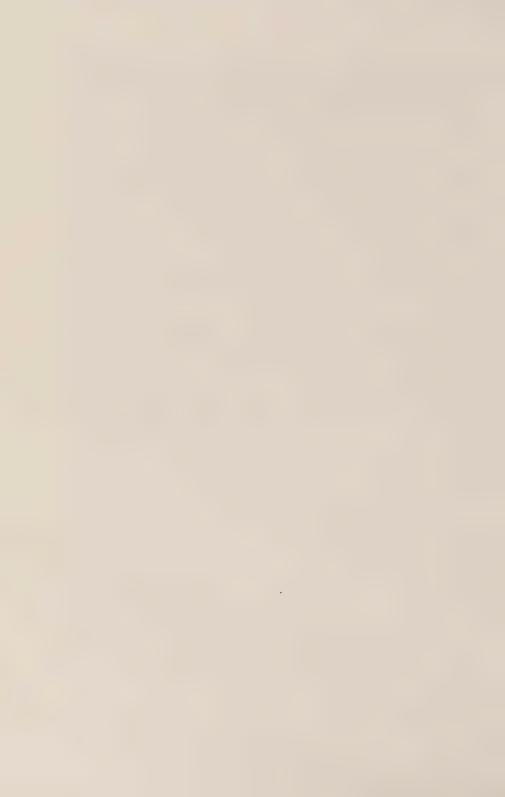
The difficulty with 'The Secret Sharer' has to do with the intrusive idea of the 'double'. Throughout the story, the fugitive Leggatt, who becomes the captain's personal stowaway, is referred to as 'my other self', 'my second self', or the 'double captain'. The point, as Jocelyn Baines remarks in *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*, is 'to suggest that the fates of these two men were interchangeable, that it was quite possible for an ordinary, decent, conscientious person to kill someone'. Yet Conrad's insistence on the 'double' motif—a fashionable one at the time—tends to overstate this dramatic truth, and obscures the most telling similarity between the two men, one a new captain not yet acquainted with his crew or his ship, the other a criminal concealed in the stateroom: simply that they are 'the only two strangers on board'. This is enough of a resemblance to make the story work.

Perhaps the squalls of double identity in 'The Secret Sharer', lashing ineffectually at its rugged moral structure, have their origin in the two-fold estrangement of its author, Joseph Conrad, so nearly at ease, but not quite, as a naturalised British subject; so nearly reconciled, but not quite, to his own fugitive past as an exile from Poland. It is our good fortune, as readers of these stories, that he struggled to find a home in a third language—after Polish and French—and did so, finally, as a

master of English fiction.

JEREMY HARDING 2003

## 'Twixt Land and Sea



#### **MAUTHOR'S NOTE**

The only bond between these three stories is, so to speak, geographical, for their scene, be it land, be it sea, is situated in the same region, which may be called the region of the Indian Ocean, with its offshoots and prolongations north of the Equator even as far as the Gulf of Siam. In point of time they belong to the period immediately after the publication of that novel with the awkward title, *Under Western Eyes*, and, as far as the life of the writer is concerned, their appearance in a volume marks a definite change in the fortunes of his fiction. For there is no denying the fact that *Under Western Eyes* found no favour in the public eye, whereas the novel called *Chance*, which followed *'Twixt Land and Sea*, was received on its first appearance by many more readers than any other of my books.

This volume of three tales was also well received, publicly and privately and from a publisher's point of view. This little success was a most timely tonic for my enfeebled bodily frame. For this may indeed be called the book of a man's convalescence, at least as to three-fourths of it; because 'The Secret Sharer', the middle story, was written much earlier than the other two.

For in truth the memories of *Under Western Eyes* are associated with the memory of a severe illness which seemed to wait like a tiger in the jungle on the turn of a path to jump on me the moment the last words of that novel were written. The memory of an illness is very much like the memory of a nightmare. On emerging from it in a much enfeebled state I was inspired to direct my tottering steps toward the Indian Ocean, a complete change of surroundings and atmosphere from the Lake of Geneva, as nobody would deny. Begun so languidly and with such a fumbling hand that the first twenty pages or more had to be thrown into the waste-paper basket, 'A Smile of Fortune', the most purely Indian-Ocean story of the three, has ended by becoming what the reader will see. I will only say for myself that I have been patted on the back for it by most unexpected people, personally unknown to me, the chief of them of course being the editor of a popular illustrated magazine, who published it serially in one mighty instalment. Who will dare say after this that the change of air had not been an immense success?

The origins of the middle story, 'The Secret Sharer', are quite other. It was written much earlier, and was published first in Harper's Magazine during the early part, I think, of 1911. Or perhaps the latter part? My memory on that point is hazy. The basic fact of the tale I had in my possession for a good many years. It was in truth the common possession of the whole fleet of merchant ships trading to India, China, and Australia: a great company, the last years of which coincided with my first years on the wider seas. The fact itself happened on board a very distinguished member of it, Cutty Sark by name and belonging to Mr Willis, a notable shipowner in his day, one of the kind (they are all underground now) who used personally to see his ships start on their voyages to those distant shores where they showed worthily the honoured houseflag of their owner. I am glad I was not too late to get at least one glimpse of Mr Willis on a very wet and gloomy morning watching from the pier-head of the New South Dock one of his clippers starting on a China voyage—an imposing figure of a man under the invariable white hat so well known in the Port of London, waiting till the head of his ship had swung downstream before giving her a dignified wave of a big gloved hand. For all I know it may have been the Cutty Sark herself, though certainly not on that fatal voyage. I do not know the date of the occurrence on which the scheme of 'The Secret Sharer' is founded; it came to light and even got into newspapers about the middle eighties, though I had heard of it before, as it were privately, among the officers of the great wool fleet in which my first years in deep water were served. It came to light under circumstances dramatic enough, I think, but which have nothing to do with my story. In the more specially maritime part of my writings this bit of presentation may take its place as one of my two Calm-pieces. For, if there is to be any classification by subjects, I have done two Storm-pieces, in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and in Typhoon; and two Calm-pieces: this one and The Shadow-Line, a book which belongs to a later period.

Notwithstanding their autobiographical form the above two stories are not the record of personal experience. Their quality, such as it is, depends on something larger if less precise: on the character, vision, and sentiment of the first twenty independent years of my life. And the same may be said of the 'Freya of the Seven Isles'. I was considerably abused for writing that story, on the ground of its cruelty, both in public prints and in private letters. I remember one from a man in America

who was quite furiously angry. He told me with curses and imprecations that I had no right to write such an abominable thing, which, he said, had gratuitously and intolerably harrowed his feelings. It was a very interesting letter to read. Impressive, too. I carried it for some days in my pocket. Had I the right? The sincerity of the anger impressed me. Had I the right? Had I really sinned as he said, or was it only that man's madness? Yet there was a method in his fury . . . I composed in my mind a violent reply, a reply of mild argument, a reply of lofty detachment; but they never got on paper in the end, and I have forgotten their phrasing. The very letter of the angry man has got lost somehow; and nothing remains now but the pages of the story, which I cannot recall and would not recall if I could.

But I am glad to think that the two women in this book—Alice, the sullen, passive victim of her fate, and the actively individual Freya, so determined to be the mistress of her own destiny—must have evoked some sympathies, because of all my volumes of short stories this was the one for which there was the greatest immediate demand.

J.C.



### To Captain C. M. Marris

Late master and owner of the Araby Maid: archipelago trader

In memory of those old days of adventure

Life is a tragic folly
Let us laugh and be jolly
Away with melancholy
Bring me a branch of holly
Life is a tragic folly

A. SYMONS

## A Smile of Fortune

A HARBOUR STORY



Ever since the sun rose I had been looking ahead. The ship glided gently in smooth water. After a sixty days' passage I was anxious to make my landfall, a fertile and beautiful island of the tropics. The more enthusiastic of its inhabitants delight in describing it as the 'Pearl of the Ocean'. Well, let us call it the 'Pearl'. It's a good name. A pearl distilling much sweetness upon the world.

This is only a way of telling you that first-rate sugar-cane is grown there. All the population of the Pearl lives for it and by it. Sugar is their daily bread, as it were. And I was coming to them for a cargo of sugar in the hope of the crop having been good and of the freights being high.

Mr Burns, my chief mate, made out the land first; and very soon I became entranced by this blue, pinnacled apparition, almost transparent against the light of the sky, a mere emanation, the astral body of an island risen to greet me from afar. It is a rare phenomenon, such a sight of the Pearl at sixty miles off. And I wondered half seriously whether it was a good omen, whether what would meet me in that island would be as luckily exceptional as this beautiful, dream-like vision so very few seamen have been privileged to behold.

But horrid thoughts of business interfered with my enjoyment of an accomplished passage. I was anxious for success and I wished, too, to do justice to the flattering latitude of my owners' instructions contained in one noble phrase: 'We leave it to you to do the best you can with the ship.' . . . All the world being thus given me for a stage, my abilities appeared to me no bigger than a pin-head.

Meantime the wind dropped, and Mr Burns began to make disagreeable remarks about my usual bad luck. I believe it was his devotion for me which made him critically outspoken on every occasion. All the same, I would not have put up with his humours if it had not been my lot at one time to nurse him through a desperate illness at sea. After snatching him out of the jaws of death, so to speak, it would have been absurd to throw away such an efficient officer. But sometimes I wished he would dismiss himself.

We were late in closing in with the land, and had to anchor outside the harbour till next day. An unpleasant and unrestful night followed. In this roadstead, strange to us both, Burns and I remained on deck almost all the time. Clouds swirled down the porphyry crags under which we lay. The rising wind made a great bullying noise amongst the naked spars, with interludes of sad moaning. I remarked that we had been in luck to fetch the anchorage before dark. It would have been a nasty, anxious night to hang off a harbour under canvas. But my chief mate was uncompromising in his attitude.

'Luck, you call it, sir! Ay-our usual luck. The sort of luck to thank

God it's no worse!'

And so he fretted through the dark hours, while I drew on my fund of philosophy. Ah, but it was an exasperating, weary, endless night, to be lying at anchor close under that black coast! The agitated water made snarling sounds all round the ship. At times a wild gust of wind out of a gully high up on the cliffs struck on our rigging a harsh and plaintive note like the wail of a forsaken soul.



By half-past seven in the morning, the ship being then inside the harbour at last and moored within a long stone's throw from the quay, my stock of philosophy was nearly exhausted. I was dressing hurriedly in my cabin when the steward came tripping in with a morning suit over his arm.

Hungry, tired, and depressed, with my head engaged inside a white shirt irritatingly stuck together by too much starch, I desired him peevishly to 'heave round with that breakfast'. I wanted to get ashore as soon as possible.

'Yes, sir. Ready at eight, sir. There's a gentleman from the shore waiting to speak to you, sir.'

This statement was curiously slurred over. I dragged the shirt violently over my head and emerged staring.

'So early!' I cried. 'Who's he? What does he want?'

On coming in from sea one has to pick up the conditions of an utterly unrelated existence. Every little event at first has the peculiar emphasis of novelty. I was greatly surprised by that early caller; but there was no reason for my steward to look so particularly foolish.

'Didn't you ask for the name?' I enquired in a stern tone.

'His name's Jacobus, I believe,' he mumbled shamefacedly.

'Mr Jacobus!' I exclaimed loudly, more surprised than ever, but with a total change of feeling. 'Why couldn't you say so at once?'

But the fellow had scuttled out of my room. Through the momen-

tarily opened door I had a glimpse of a tall, stout man standing in the cuddy by the table on which the cloth was already laid; a 'harbour' tablecloth, stainless and dazzlingly white. So far good.

I shouted courteously through the closed door that I was dressing and would be with him in a moment. In return the assurance that there was no hurry reached me in the visitor's deep, quiet undertone. His time was my own. He dared say I would give him a cup of coffee presently.

'I am afraid you will have a poor breakfast,' I cried apologetically. 'We have been sixty-one days at sea, you know.'

A quiet little laugh, with a 'That'll be all right, Captain,' was his answer. All this, words, intonation, the glimpsed attitude of the man in the cuddy, had an unexpected character, a something friendly in it—propitiatory. And my surprise was not diminished thereby. What did this call mean? Was it the sign of some dark design against my commercial innocence?

Ah! These commercial interests—spoiling the finest life under the sun. Why must the sea be used for trade—and for war as well? Why kill and traffic on it, pursuing selfish aims of no great importance after all? It would have been so much nicer just to sail about with here and there a port and a bit of land to stretch one's legs on, buy a few books, and get a change of cooking for a while. But, living in a world more or less homicidal and desperately mercantile, it was plainly my duty to make the best of its opportunities.

My owners' letter had left it to me, as I have said before, to do my best for the ship, according to my own judgement. But it contained also a postscript worded somewhat as follows:

'Without meaning to interfere with your liberty of action we are writing by the outgoing mail to some of our business friends there who may be of assistance to you. We desire you particularly to call on Mr Jacobus, a prominent merchant and charterer. Should you hit it off with him he may be able to put you in the way of profitable employment for the ship.'

Hit it off! Here was the prominent creature absolutely on board asking for the favour of a cup of coffee! And life not being a fairy-tale the improbability of the event almost shocked me. Had I discovered an enchanted nook of the earth where wealthy merchants rush fasting on board ships before they are fairly moored? Was this white magic or

merely some black trick of trade? I came in the end (while making the bow of my tie) to suspect that perhaps I did not get the name right. I had been thinking of the prominent Mr Jacobus pretty frequently during the passage, and my hearing might have been deceived by some remote similarity of sound . . . The steward might have said Antrobus —or maybe Jackson.

But coming out of my stateroom with an interrogative 'Mr Jacobus?' I was met by a quiet 'Yes,' uttered with a gentle smile. The 'yes' was rather perfunctory. He did not seem to make much of the fact that he was Mr Jacobus. I took stock of a big, pale face, hair thin on the top, whiskers also thin, of a faded nondescript colour, heavy eyelids. The thick, smooth lips in repose looked as if glued together. The smile was faint. A heavy, tranquil man. I named my two officers, who just then came down to breakfast; but why Mr Burns's silent demeanour should suggest suppressed indignation I could not understand.

While we were taking our seats round the table some disconnected words of an altercation going on in the companion-way reached my ear. A stranger apparently wanted to come down to interview me, and the

steward was opposing him.

'You can't see him.'

'Why can't I?'

'The captain is at breakfast, I tell you. He'll be going on shore presently, and you can speak to him on deck.'

'That's not fair. You let--'

'I've had nothing to do with that.'

'Oh yes, you have. Everybody ought to have the same chance. You let that fellow——'

The rest I lost. The person having been repulsed successfully, the steward came down. I can't say he looked flushed—he was a mulatto—but he looked flustered. After putting the dishes on the table he remained by the sideboard with that lackadaisical air of indifference he used to assume when he had done something too clever by half and was afraid of getting into a scrape over it. The contemptuous expression of Mr Burns's face as he looked from him to me was really extraordinary. I couldn't imagine what new bee had stung the mate now.

The captain being silent, nobody else cared to speak, as is the way in ships. And I was saying nothing simply because I had been made dumb by the splendour of the entertainment. I had expected the usual sea-

breakfast, whereas I beheld spread before us a veritable feast of shore provisions: eggs, sausages, butter which plainly did not come from a Danish tin, cutlets, and even a dish of potatoes. It was three weeks since I had seen a real, live potato. I contemplated them with interest, and Mr Jacobus disclosed himself as a man of human, homely sympathies, and something of a thought-reader.

'Try them, Captain,' he encouraged me in a friendly undertone.

'They are excellent.'

'They look that,' I admitted. 'Grown on the island, I suppose.'

'Oh no, imported. Those grown here would be more expensive.'

I was grieved at the ineptitude of the conversation. Were these the topics for a prominent and wealthy merchant to discuss? I thought the simplicity with which he made himself at home rather attractive; but what is one to talk about to a man who comes on one suddenly, after sixty-one days at sea, out of a totally unknown little town in an island one has never seen before? What were (besides sugar) the interests of that crumb of the earth, its gossip, its topics of conversation? To draw him on business at once would have been almost indecent—or even worse: impolitic. All I could do at the moment was to keep on in the old groove.

'Are the provisions generally dear here?' I asked, fretting inwardly at

my inanity.

'I wouldn't say that,' he answered placidly, with that appearance of

saving his breath his restrained manner of speaking suggested.

He would not be more explicit, yet he did not evade the subject. Eyeing the table in a spirit of complete abstemiousness (he wouldn't let me help him to any eatables) he went into details of supply. The beef was for the most part imported from Madagascar; mutton, of course, was rare and somewhat expensive, but good goat's flesh——

'Are these goat's cutlets?' I exclaimed hastily, pointing at one of the

dishes.

Posed sentimentally by the sideboard, the steward gave a start.

'Lor', no, sir! It's real mutton!'

Mr Burns got through his breakfast impatiently, as if exasperated by being made a party to some monstrous foolishness, muttered a curt excuse, and went on deck. Shortly afterwards the second mate took his smooth red countenance out of the cabin. With the appetite of a schoolboy, and after two months of sea-fare, he appreciated the generous spread. But I did not. It smacked of extravagance. All the same, it was a remarkable feat to have produced it so quickly, and I congratulated the steward on his smartness in a somewhat ominous tone. He gave me a deprecatory smile and, in a way I didn't know what to make of, blinked his fine dark eyes in the direction of the guest.

The latter asked under his breath for another cup of coffee, and nibbled ascetically at a piece of very hard ship's biscuit. I don't think he consumed a square inch in the end; but meantime he gave me, casually as it were, a complete account of the sugar crop, of the local business houses, of the state of the freight market. All that talk was interspersed with hints as to personalities, amounting to veiled warnings, but his pale, fleshy face remained equable, without a gleam, as if ignorant of his voice. As you may imagine, I opened my ears very wide. Every word was precious. My ideas as to the value of business friendship were being favourably modified. He gave me the names of all the disponible ships, together with their tonnage and the names of their commanders. From that, which was still commercial information, he condescended to mere harbour gossip. The Hilda had unaccountably lost her figurehead in the Bay of Bengal, and her captain was greatly affected by this. He and the ship had been getting on in years together, and the old gentleman imagined this strange event to be the forerunner of his own early dissolution. The Stella had experienced awful weather off the Cape had her decks swept, and the chief officer washed overboard. And only a few hours before reaching port the baby died. Poor Captain H and his wife were terribly cut up. If they had only been able to bring it into port alive it could have been probably saved; but the wind failed them for the last week or so, light breezes, and . . . the baby was going to be buried this afternoon. He supposed I would attend-

'Do you think I ought to?' I asked shrinkingly.

He thought so, decidedly. It would be greatly appreciated. All the captains in the harbour were going to attend. Poor Mrs H—— was quite prostrated. Pretty hard on H—— altogether.

'And you, Captain—you are not married, I suppose?'

'No, I am not married,' I said. 'Neither married nor even engaged.'

Mentally I thanked my stars; and while he smiled in a musing, dreamy fashion, I expressed my acknowledgements for his visit and for the interesting business information he had been good enough to impart to me. But I said nothing of my wonder thereat.

'Of course, I would have made a point of calling on you in a day or two,' I concluded.

He raised his eyelids distinctly at me, and somehow managed to look rather more sleepy than before.

'In accordance with my owners' instructions,' I explained. 'You have had their letter, of course?'

By that time he had raised his eyebrows too, but without any particular emotion. On the contrary, he struck me then as absolutely imperturbable.

'Oh! You must be thinking of my brother.'

It was for me, then, to say 'Oh!' But I hope that no more than civil surprise appeared in my voice when I asked him to what, then, I owed the pleasure . . . He was reaching for an inside pocket leisurely.

'My brother's a very different person. But I am well known in this

part of the world. You've probably heard—"

I took a card he extended to me. A thick business card, as I lived! Alfred Jacobus—the other was Ernest—dealer in every description of ship's stores! Provisions salt and fresh, oils, paints, rope, canvas, etc. etc. Ships in harbour victualled by contract on moderate terms—

'I've never heard of you,' I said brusquely.

His low-pitched assurance did not abandon him.

'You will be very well satisfied,' he breathed out quietly.

I was not placated. I had the sense of having been circumvented somehow. Yet I had deceived myself—if there was any deception. But the confounded cheek of inviting himself to breakfast was enough to deceive anyone. And the thought struck me: Why! The fellow had provided all these eatables himself in the way of business. I said:

'You must have got up mighty early this morning.'

He admitted with simplicity that he was on the quay before six o'clock waiting for my ship to come in. He gave me the impression that it would be impossible to get rid of him now.

'If you think we are going to live on that scale,' I said, looking at the

table with an irritated eye, 'you are jolly well mistaken.'

'You'll find it all right, Captain. I quite understand.'

Nothing could disturb his equanimity. I felt dissatisfied, but I could not very well fly out at him. He had told me many useful things—and, besides, he was the brother of that wealthy merchant. That seemed queer enough.

I rose and told him curtly that I must now go ashore. At once he offered the use of his boat for all the time of my stay in port.

'I only make a nominal charge,' he continued equably. 'My man remains all day at the landing-steps. You have only to blow a whistle

when you want the boat.'

And, standing aside at every doorway to let me go through first, he carried me off in his custody after all. As we crossed the quarter-deck two shabby individuals stepped forward and in mournful silence offered me business cards which I took from them without a word under his heavy eye. It was a useless and gloomy ceremony. They were the touts of the other ship-chandlers, and he, placid at my back, ignored their existence.

We parted on the quay, after he had expressed quietly the hope of seeing me often 'at the store'. He had a smoking-room for captains there, with newspapers and a box of 'rather decent cigars'. I left him

very unceremoniously.

My consignees received me with the usual business heartiness, but their account of the state of the freight-market was by no means so favourable as the talk of the wrong Jacobus had led me to expect. Naturally I became inclined now to put my trust in his version, rather. As I closed the door of the private office behind me I thought to myself: 'H'm. A lot of lies. Commercial diplomacy. That's the sort of thing a man coming from sea has got to expect. They would try to charter the ship under the market rate.'

In the big, outer room, full of desks, the chief clerk, a tall, lean, shaved person in immaculate white clothes and with a shiny, closely cropped black head on which silvery gleams came and went, rose from his place and detained me affably. Anything they could do for me, they would be most happy. Was I likely to call again in the afternoon? What?

Going to a funeral? Oh yes, poor Captain H—.

He pulled a long, sympathetic face for a moment, then, dismissing from this workaday world the baby, which had got ill in a tempest and had died from too much calm at sea, he asked me with a dental, shark-like smile—if sharks had false teeth—whether I had yet made my little arrangements for the ship's stay in port.

'Yes, with Jacobus,' I answered carelessly. 'I understand he's the brother of Mr Ernest Jacobus, to whom I have an introduction from

my owners.'

I was not sorry to let him know I was not altogether helpless in the hands of his firm. He screwed his thin lips dubiously.

'Why,' I cried, 'isn't he the brother?'

'Oh yes . . . They haven't spoken to each other for eighteen years,' he added impressively after a pause.

'Indeed! What's the quarrel about?'

'Oh, nothing! Nothing that one would care to mention,' he protested primly. 'He's got quite a large business. The best ship-chandler here, without a doubt. Business is all very well, but there is such a thing as personal character too, isn't there? Good morning, Captain.'

He went away mincingly to his desk. He amused me. He resembled an old maid, a commercial old maid, shocked by some impropriety. Was it a commercial impropriety? Commercial impropriety is a serious matter, for it aims at one's pocket. Or was he only a purist in conduct who disapproved of Jacobus doing his own touting? It was certainly undignified. I wondered how the merchant brother liked it. But then different countries, different customs. In a community so isolated and so exclusively 'trading', social standards have their own scale.

## **2**

I would have gladly dispensed with the mournful opportunity of becoming acquainted by sight with all my fellow captains at once. However, I found my way to the cemetery. We made a considerable group of bareheaded men in sombre garments. I noticed that those of our company most approaching to the now obsolete sea-dog type were the most moved—perhaps because they had less 'manner' than the new generation. The old sea-dog, away from his natural element, was a simple and sentimental animal. I noticed one—he was facing me across the grave—who was dropping tears. They trickled down his weather-beaten face like drops of rain on an old rugged wall. I learned afterwards that he was looked upon as the terror of sailors, a hard man; that he had never had wife or chick of his own, and that, engaged from his tenderest years in deep-sea voyages, he knew women and children merely by sight.

Perhaps he was dropping those tears over his lost opportunities, from sheer envy of paternity and in strange jealousy of a sorrow which he could never know. Man, and even the seaman, is a capricious animal, the creature and the victim of lost opportunities. But he made me feel

ashamed of my callousness. I had no tears.

I listened with horribly critical detachment to that service I had had to read myself, once or twice, over childlike men who had died at sea. The words of hope and defiance, the winged words so inspiring in the free immensity of water and sky, seemed to fall wearily into the little grave. What was the use of asking Death where her sting was, before that small, dark hole in the ground? And then my thoughts escaped me altogether—away into matters of life—and no very high matters at that—ships, freights, business. In the instability of his emotions man resembles deplorably a monkey. I was disgusted with my thoughts—and I thought: Shall I be able to get a charter soon? Time's money . . . Will that Jacobus really put good business in my way? . . . I must go and see him in a day or two.

Don't imagine that I pursued these thoughts with any precision. They pursued me rather: vague, shadowy, restless, shamefaced. Theirs was a callous, abominable, almost revolting, pertinacity. And it was the presence of that pertinacious ship-chandler which had started them. He stood mournfully amongst our little band of men from the sea, and I was angry at his presence, which, suggesting his brother the merchant, had caused me to become outrageous to myself. For indeed I had preserved some decency of feeling. It was only the mind which——

It was over at last. The poor father—a man of forty, with black, bushy side-whiskers and a pathetic gash on his freshly shaved chin—thanked us all, swallowing his tears. But for some reason, either because I lingered at the gate of the cemetery, being somewhat hazy as to my way back, or because I was the youngest, or ascribing my moodiness caused by remorse to some more worthy and appropriate sentiment, or simply because I was even more of a stranger to him than the others—he singled me out. Keeping at my side, he renewed his thanks, which I listened to in a gloomy, conscience-stricken silence. Suddenly he slipped one hand under my arm and waved the other after a tall, stout figure walking away by itself down a street in a flutter of thin, grey garments.

'That's a good fellow—a real good fellow—' he swallowed down a belated sob—'this Iacobus.'

And he told me in a low voice that Jacobus was the first man to

board his ship on arrival, and, learning of their misfortune, had taken charge of everything, volunteered to attend to all routine business, carried off the ship's papers on shore, arranged for the funeral—

'A good fellow. I was knocked over. I had been looking at my wife for ten days. And helpless. Just you think of that! The dear little chap died the very day we made the land. How I managed to take the ship in, God alone knows! I couldn't see anything; I couldn't speak; I couldn't . . . You've heard, perhaps, that we lost our mate overboard on the passage? There was no one to do it for me. And the poor woman nearly crazy down below there all alone with the . . . By the Lord! It isn't fair.'

We walked in silence together. I did not know how to part from him. On the quay he let go my arm and struck fiercely his fist into the palm of his other hand.

'By God, it isn't fair!' he cried again. 'Don't you ever marry unless you can chuck the sea first . . . It isn't fair.'

I had no intention to 'chuck the sea', and when he left me to go aboard his ship I felt convinced that I would never marry. While I was waiting at the steps for Jacobus's boatman, who had gone off somewhere, the captain of the *Hilda* joined me, a slender silk umbrella in his hand and the sharp points of his archaic, Gladstonian shirt-collar framing a small, clean-shaved, ruddy face. It was wonderfully fresh for his age, beautifully modelled, and lit up by remarkably clear blue eyes. A lot of white hair, glossy like spun glass, curled upwards slightly under the brim of his valuable, ancient, panama hat with a broad black ribbon. In the aspect of that vivacious, neat, little old man there was something quaintly angelic and also boyish.

He accosted me, as though he had been in the habit of seeing me every day of his life from my earliest childhood, with a whimsical remark on the appearance of a stout Negro woman who was sitting upon a stool near the edge of the quay. Presently he observed amiably that I had a very pretty little barque.

I returned this civil speech by saying readily:

'Not so pretty as the Hilda.'

At once the corners of his clear-cut, sensitive mouth dropped dismally.

'Oh dear! I can hardly bear to look at her now.'

Did I know, he asked anxiously, that he had lost the figurehead of his ship; a woman in a blue tunic edged with gold, the face perhaps not

so very, very pretty, but her bare white arms beautifully shaped and extended as if she were swimming? Did I? Who would have expected such a thing! . . . After twenty years too!

Nobody could have guessed from his tone that the woman was made of wood; his trembling voice, his agitated manner, gave to his lamentations a ludicrously scandalous flavour...Disappeared at night-a clear fine night with just a slight swell—in the Gulf of Bengal. Went off without a splash; no one in the ship could tell why, how, at what hour after twenty years last October . . . Did I ever hear . . .

I assured him sympathetically that I had never heard—and he became very doleful. This meant no good, he was sure. There was something in it which looked like a warning. But when I remarked that surely another figure of a woman could be procured I found myself being soundly rated for my levity. The old boy flushed pink under his clear tan as if I had proposed something improper. One could replace masts, I was told, or a lost rudder—any working part of a ship; but where was the use of sticking up a new figurehead? What satisfaction? How could one care for it? It was easy to see that I had never been shipmates with a figurehead for over twenty years.

'A new figurehead!' he scolded in unquenchable indignation. 'Why! I've been a widower now for eight-and-twenty years come next May, and I would just as soon think of getting a new wife. You're as bad as

that fellow Jacobus.'

I was highly amused.

'What has Jacobus done? Did he want you to marry again, Captain?' I enquired in a deferential tone. But he was launched now, and only

grinned fiercely.

'Procure-indeed! He's the sort of chap to procure you anything you like for a price. I hadn't been moored here for an hour when he got on board and at once offered to sell me a figurehead he happens to have in his yard somewhere. He got Smith, my mate, to talk to me about it. "Mr Smith," says I, "don't you know me better than that? Am I the sort that would pick up with another man's cast-off figurehead?" And after all these years too! The way some of you young fellows talk——'

I affected great compunction, and as I stepped into the boat I said soberly:

'Then I see nothing for it but to fit in a neat fiddle-head—perhaps. You know, carved scroll-work, nicely gilt.'

He became very dejected after his outburst.

'Yes. Scroll-work. Maybe. Jacobus hinted at that too. He's never at a loss when there's any money to be extracted from a sailorman. He would make me pay through the nose for that carving. A gilt fiddle-head did you say—eh? I daresay it would do for you. You young fellows don't seem to have any feeling for what's proper.'

He made a convulsive gesture with his right arm.

'Never mind. Nothing can make much difference. I would just as soon let the old thing go about the world with a bare cutwater,' he cried sadly. Then as the boat got away from the steps he raised his voice on the edge of the quay with comical animosity:

'I would! If only to spite that figurehead-procuring bloodsucker. I am an old bird here and don't you forget it. Come and see me on board some day!'

I spent my first evening in port quietly in my ship's cuddy; and glad enough was I to think that the shore life, which strikes one as so pettily complex, discordant, and so full of new faces on first coming from sea, could be kept off for a few hours longer. I was, however, fated to hear the Jacobus note once more before I slept.

Mr Burns had gone ashore after the evening meal to have, as he said, 'a look round'. As it was quite dark when he announced his intention I didn't ask him what it was he expected to see. Sometime about midnight, while sitting with a book in the saloon, I heard cautious movements in the lobby and hailed him by name.

Burns came in, stick and hat in hand, incredibly vulgarised by his smart shore togs, with a jaunty air, and an odious twinkle in his eye. Being asked to sit down, he laid his hat and stick on the table, and after we had talked of ship affairs for a little while:

'I've been hearing pretty tales on shore about that ship-chandler fellow who snatched the job from you so neatly, sir.'

I remonstrated with my late patient for his manner of expressing himself. But he only tossed his head disdainfully. A pretty dodge, indeed: boarding a strange ship with breakfast in two baskets for all hands and calmly inviting himself to the captain's table! Never heard of anything so crafty and so impudent in his life.

I found myself defending Jacobus's unusual methods.

'He's the brother of one of the wealthiest merchants in the port.' The mate's eyes fairly snapped green sparks.

'His grand brother hasn't spoken to him for eighteen or twenty years,' he declared triumphantly. 'So there!'

'I know all about that,' I interrupted loftily.

'Do you, sir? H'm!' His mind was still running on the ethics of commercial competition. 'I don't like to see your good nature taken advantage of. He's bribed that steward of ours with a five-rupee note to let him come down—or ten for that matter. He don't care. He will shove that and more into the bill presently.'

'Is that one of the tales you have heard ashore?' I asked.

He assured me that his own sense could tell him that much. No; what he had heard on shore was that no respectable person in the whole town would come near Jacobus. He lived in a large, old-fashioned house in one of the quiet streets with a big garden. After telling me this, Burns put on a mysterious air. 'He keeps a girl shut up there who, they say——'

'I suppose you've heard all this gossip in some eminently respectable

place?' I snapped at him in a most sarcastic tone.

The shaft told, because Mr Burns, like many other disagreeable people, was very sensitive himself. He remained as if thunderstruck, with his mouth open for some further communication, but I did not give him the chance. 'And, anyhow, what the deuce do I care?' I added, retiring into my room.

And this was a natural thing to say. Yet somehow I was not indifferent. I admit it is absurd to be concerned with the morals of one's shipchandler, if ever so well connected; but his personality had stamped

itself upon my first day in harbour, in the way you know.

After this initial exploit Jacobus showed himself anything but intrusive. He was out in a boat early every morning going round the ships he served, and occasionally remaining on board one of them for breakfast with the captain.

As I discovered that this practice was generally accepted, I just nodded to him familiarly when one morning, on coming out of my room, I found him in the cabin. Glancing over the table I saw that his place was already laid. He stood awaiting my appearance, very bulky and placid, holding a beautiful bunch of flowers in his thick hand. He offered them to my notice with a faint, sleepy smile. From his own garden; had a very fine old garden; picked them himself that morning before going out to business; thought I would like . . . He

turned away. 'Steward, can you oblige me with some water in a large jar, please?'

I assured him jocularly, as I took my place at the table, that he made me feel as if I were a pretty girl, and that he mustn't be surprised if I blushed. But he was busy arranging his floral tribute at the sideboard. 'Stand it before the captain's plate, steward, please.' He made this request in his usual undertone.

The offering was so pointed that I could do no less than to raise it to my nose, and as he sat down noiselessly he breathed out the opinion that a few flowers improved notably the appearance of a ship's saloon. He wondered why I did not have a shelf fitted all round the skylight for flowers in pots to take with me to sea. He had a skilled workman able to fit up shelves in a day, and he could procure me two or three dozen good plants——

The tips of his thick, round fingers rested composedly on the edge of the table on each side of his cup of coffee. His face remained immovable. Mr Burns was smiling maliciously to himself. I declared that I hadn't the slightest intention of turning my skylight into a conservatory only to keep the cabin-table in a perpetual mess of mould and

dead vegetable matter.

'Rear most beautiful flowers,' he insisted, with an upward glance. 'It's no trouble really.'

'Oh yes, it is. Lots of trouble,' I contradicted. 'And in the end some fool leaves the skylight open in a fresh breeze, a flick of salt water gets at them, and the whole lot is dead in a week.'

Mr Burns snorted a contemptuous approval. Jacobus gave up the subject passively. After a time he unglued his thick lips to ask me if I had seen his brother yet. I was very curt in my answer.

'No, not yet.'

'A very different person,' he remarked dreamily and got up. His movements were particularly noiseless. 'Well—thank you, Captain. If anything is not to your liking, please mention it to your steward. I suppose you will be giving a dinner to the office-clerks presently.'

'What for?' I cried, with some warmth. 'If I were a steady trader to the port I could understand it. But a complete stranger! . . . I may not turn up again here for years. I don't see why I . . . Do you mean to say it

is customary?'

'It will be expected from a man like you,' he breathed out placidly.

'Eight of the principal clerks, the manager, that's nine, you three gentlemen, that's twelve. It needn't be very expensive. If you tell your steward to give me a day's notice——'

'It will be expected of me! Why should it be expected of me? Is it

because I look particularly soft—or what?'

His immobility struck me as dignified suddenly, his imperturbable quality as dangerous. 'There's plenty of time to think about that,' I concluded weakly, with a gesture that tried to wave him away. But before he departed he took time to mention regretfully that he had not yet had the pleasure of seeing me at his 'store' to sample those cigars. He had a parcel of six thousand to dispose of, very cheap.

'I think it would be worth your while to secure some,' he added, with

a fat, melancholy smile and left the cabin.

Mr Burns struck his fist on the table excitedly.

'Did you ever see such impudence! He's made up his mind to get something out of you one way or another, sir.'

At once feeling inclined to defend Jacobus, I observed philosophically that all this was business, I supposed. But my absurd mate, muttering broken, disjointed sentences, such as, 'I cannot bear . . . Mark my words! . . .' and so on, flung out of the cabin. If I hadn't nursed him through that deadly fever I wouldn't have suffered such manners for a single day.

## **3**

Jacobus having put me in mind of his wealthy brother, I concluded I would pay that business call at once. I had by that time heard a little more of him. He was a member of the Council, where he made himself objectionable to the authorities. He exercised a considerable influence on public opinion. Lots of people owed him money. He was an importer on a great scale of all sorts of goods. For instance, the whole supply of bags for sugar was practically in his hands. This last fact I did not learn till afterwards. The general impression conveyed to me was that of a local personage. He was a bachelor and gave weekly card-parties in his house out of town, which were attended by the best people in the colony.

The greater, then, was my surprise to discover his office in shabby

surroundings, quite away from the business quarter, amongst a lot of hovels. Guided by a black board with white lettering, I climbed a narrow wooden staircase and entered a room with a bare floor of planks littered with bits of brown paper and wisps of packing straw. A great number of what looked like wine-cases were piled up against one of the walls. A lanky, inky, light-yellow mulatto youth, miserably long-necked and generally recalling a sick chicken, got off a three-legged stool behind a cheap deal desk and faced me as if gone dumb with fright. I had some difficulty in persuading him to take in my name, though I could not get from him the nature of his objection. He did it at last with an almost agonised reluctance which ceased to be mysterious to me when I heard him being sworn at menacingly with savage, suppressed growls, then audibly cuffed and finally kicked out without any concealment whatever; because he came back flying head foremost through the door with a stifled shriek.

To say I was startled would not express it. I remained still, like a man lost in a dream. Clapping both his hands to that part of his frail anatomy which had received the shock, the poor wretch said to me simply:

'Will you go in, please.'

His lamentable self-possession was wonderful; but it did not do away with the incredibility of the experience. A preposterous notion that I had seen this boy somewhere before, a thing obviously impossible, was like a delicate finishing touch of weirdness added to a scene fit to raise doubts as to one's sanity. I stared anxiously about me like an awakened somnambulist.

'I say,' I cried loudly, 'there isn't a mistake, is there? This is Mr Jacobus's office?'

The boy gazed at me with a pained expression—and somehow so familiar! A voice within growled offensively:

'Come in, come in, since you are there . . . I didn't know.'

I crossed the outer room as one approaches the den of some unknown wild beast; with intrepidity but in some excitement. Only no wild beast that ever lived would rouse one's indignation; the power to do that belongs to the odiousness of the human brute. And I was very indignant, which did not prevent me from being at once struck by the extraordinary resemblance of the two brothers.

This one was dark instead of being fair like the other; but he was as big. He was without his coat and waistcoat; he had been doubtless

snoozing in the rocking-chair which stood in a corner furthest from the window. Above the great bulk of his crumpled white shirt, buttoned with three diamond studs, his round face looked swarthy. It was moist; his brown moustache hung limp and ragged. He pushed a common, cane-bottomed chair towards me with his foot.

'Sit down.'

I glanced at it casually, then, turning my indignant eyes full upon him, I declared in precise and incisive tones that I had called in obedience to my owners' instructions.

'Oh! Yes. H'm! I didn't understand what that fool was saying . . . But never mind! It will teach the scoundrel to disturb me at this time of the

day,' he added, grinning at me with savage cynicism.

I looked at my watch. It was past three o'clock—quite the full swing of afternoon office work in the port. He snarled imperiously, 'Sit down, Captain.'

I acknowledged the gracious invitation by saying deliberately:

'I can listen to all you may have to say without sitting down.'

Emitting a loud and vehement 'Pshaw!' he glared for a moment, very round-eyed and fierce. It was like a gigantic tomcat spitting at one suddenly. 'Look at him! . . . What do you fancy yourself to be? What did you come here for? If you won't sit down and talk business you had better go to the devil.'

'I don't know him personally,' I said. 'But after this I wouldn't mind calling on him. It would be refreshing to meet a gentleman.'

He followed me, growling behind my back:

'The impudence! I've a good mind to write to your owners what I think of you.'

I turned on him for a moment:

'As it happens, I don't care. For my part, I assure you I won't even take the trouble to mention you to them.'

He stopped at the door of his office while I traversed the littered anteroom. I think he was somewhat taken aback.

'I will break every bone in your body', he roared suddenly at the miserable mulatto lad, 'if you ever dare to disturb me before half-past three for anybody. D'ye hear? For anybody! . . . Let alone any damned skipper,' he added in a lower growl.

The frail youngster, swaying like a reed, made a low moaning sound. I stopped short and addressed this sufferer with advice. It was prompted

by the sight of a hammer (used for opening the wine-cases, I suppose) which was lying on the floor.

'If I were you, my boy, I would have that thing up my sleeve when I went in next, and at the first occasion I would——'

What was there so familiar in that lad's yellow face? Entrenched and quaking behind the flimsy desk, he never looked up. His heavy, lowered eyelids gave me suddenly the clue of the puzzle. He resembled—yes, those thick glued lips—he resembled the brothers Jacobus. He resembled both, the wealthy merchant and the pushing shopkeeper (who resembled each other); he resembled them as much as a thin, light-yellow mulatto lad may resemble a big, stout, middle-aged white man. It was the exotic complexion and the slightness of his build which had put me off so completely. Now I saw in him unmistakably the Jacobus strain, weakened, attenuated, diluted as it were in a bucket of water—and I refrained from finishing my speech. I had intended to say, 'Crack this brute's head for him.' I still felt the conclusion to be sound. But it is no trifling responsibility to counsel parricide to anyone, however deeply injured.

'Beggarly—cheeky—skippers.'

I despised the emphatic growl at my back; only, being much vexed and upset, I regret to say that I slammed the door behind me in a most undignified manner.

It may not appear altogether absurd if I say that I brought out from that interview a kindlier view of the other Jacobus. It was with a feeling resembling partisanship that, a few days later, I called at his 'store'. That long, cavern-like place of business, very dim at the back and stuffed full of all sorts of goods, was entered from the street by a lofty archway. At the far end I saw my Jacobus exerting himself in his shirt-sleeves among his assistants. The captains' room was a small, vaulted apartment with a stone floor and heavy iron bars in its windows like a dungeon converted to hospitable purposes. A couple of cheerful bottles and several gleaming glasses made a brilliant cluster round a tall, cool, red earthenware pitcher on the centre table, which was littered with newspapers from all parts of the world. A well-groomed stranger in a smart grey-check suit, sitting with one leg flung over his knee, put down one of these sheets briskly and nodded to me.

I guessed him to be a steamer-captain. It was impossible to get to know these men. They came and went too quickly, and their ships lay

moored far out, at the very entrance of the harbour. Theirs was another life altogether. He yawned slightly.

'Dull hole, isn't it?'

I understood this to allude to the town.

'Do you find it so?' I murmured.

'Don't you? But I'm off tomorrow, thank goodness.'

He was a very gentlemanly person, good-natured and superior. I watched him draw the open box of cigars to his side of the table, take a big cigar-case out of his pocket, and begin to fill it very methodically. Presently, on our eyes meeting, he winked like a common mortal and invited me to follow his example. 'They are really decent smokes.'

I shook my head.

'I am not off tomorrow.'

'What of that? Think I am abusing old Jacobus's hospitality? Heavens! It goes into the bill, of course. He spreads such little matters all over his account. He can take care of himself! Why, it's business——'

I noted a shadow fall over his well-satisfied expression, a momentary hesitation in closing his cigar-case. But he ended by putting it in his pocket jauntily. A placid voice uttered in the doorway, 'That's quite correct, Captain.'

The large, noiseless Jacobus advanced into the room. His quietness, in the circumstances, amounted to cordiality. He had put on his jacket before joining us, and he sat down in the chair vacated by the steamerman, who nodded again to me and went out with a short, jarring laugh. A profound silence reigned. With his drowsy stare Jacobus seemed to be slumbering open-eyed. Yet, somehow, I was aware of being profoundly scrutinised by those heavy eyes. In the enormous cavern of the store somebody began to nail down a case, expertly: tap-tap . . . tap-tap-tap. Two other experts, one slow and nasal, the other shrill and snappy, started checking an invoice.

'A half-coil of three-inch manilla rope.'

'Right!'

'Six assorted shackles.'

'Right!'

'Six tins assorted soups, three of paté, two asparagus, fourteen pounds tobacco, cabin.'

'Right!'

'It's for the captain who was here just now,' breathed out the im-





movable Jacobus. 'These steamer orders are very small. They pick up what they want as they go along. That man will be in Samarang in less than a fortnight. Very small orders indeed.'

The calling over of the items went on in the shop; an extraordinary jumble of varied articles, paintbrushes, Yorkshire Relish, etc. etc. . . .

'Three sacks of best potatoes,' read out the nasal voice.

At this Jacobus blinked like a sleeping man roused by a shake, and displayed some animation. At his order, shouted into the shop, a smirking half-caste clerk with his ringlets much oiled and with a pen stuck behind his ear, brought in a sample of six potatoes which he paraded in a row on the table.

Being urged to look at their beauty, I gave them a cold and hostile glance. Calmly, Jacobus proposed that I should order ten or fifteen tons—tons! I couldn't believe my ears. My crew could not have eaten such a lot in a year; and potatoes (excuse these practical remarks) are a highly perishable commodity. I thought he was joking—or else trying to find out whether I was an unutterable idiot. But his purpose was not so simple. I discovered that he meant me to buy them on my own account.

'I am proposing you a bit of business, Captain. I wouldn't charge

you a great price.'

I told him that I did not go in for trade. I even added grimly that I knew only too well how that sort of spec generally ended.

He sighed and clasped his hands on his stomach with exemplary resignation. I admired the placidity of his impudence. Then waking up somewhat:

'Won't you try a cigar, Captain?'

'No, thanks. I don't smoke cigars.'

'For once!' he exclaimed, in a patient whisper. A melancholy silence ensued. You know how sometimes a person discloses a certain unsuspected depth and acuteness of thought; that is, in other words, utters something unexpected. It was unexpected enough to hear Jacobus say:

'The man who just went out was right enough. You might take one,

Captain. Here everything is bound to be in the way of business.'

I felt a little ashamed of myself. The remembrance of his horrid brother made him appear quite a decent sort of fellow. It was with some compunction that I said a few words to the effect that I could have no possible objection to his hospitality.

Before I was a minute older I saw where this admission was leading

me. As if changing the subject, Jacobus mentioned that his private house was about ten minutes' walk away. It had a beautiful old walled garden. Something really remarkable. I ought to come round some day and have a look at it.

He seemed to be a lover of gardens. I too take extreme delight in them; but I did not mean my compunction to carry me as far as Jacobus's flower-beds, however beautiful and old. He added, with a certain homeliness of tone:

'There's only my girl there.'

It is difficult to set everything down in due order; so I must revert here to what happened a week or two before. The medical officer of the port had come on board my ship to have a look at one of my crew who was ailing, and naturally enough he was asked to step into the cabin. A fellow shipmaster of mine was there too; and in the conversation, somehow or other, the name of Jacobus came to be mentioned. It was pronounced with no particular reverence by the other man, I believe. I don't remember now what I was going to say. The doctor—a pleasant, cultivated fellow, with an assured manner—prevented me by striking in, in a sour tone:

'Ah! You're talking about my respected papa-in-law.'

Of course, that sally silenced us at the time. But I remembered the episode, and at this juncture, pushed for something non-committal to say, I enquired with polite surprise:

'You have your married daughter living with you, Mr Jacobus?'

He moved his big hand from right to left quietly. No! That was another of his girls, he stated ponderously and under his breath as usual. She... He seemed in a pause to be ransacking his mind for some kind of descriptive phrase. But my hopes were disappointed. He merely produced his stereotyped definition.

'She's a very different sort of person.'

'Indeed... And by the by, Jacobus, I called on your brother the other day. It's no great compliment if I say that I found him a very different sort of person from you.'

He had an air of profound reflection, then remarked quaintly:

'He's a man of regular habits.'

He might have been alluding to the habit of late siesta; but I mumbled something about 'beastly habits anyhow'—and left the store abruptly.



My little passage with Jacobus the merchant became known generally. One or two of my acquaintances made distant allusions to it. Perhaps the mulatto boy had talked. I must confess that people appeared rather scandalised, but not with Jacobus's brutality. A man I knew remonstrated with me for my hastiness.

I gave him the whole story of my visit, not forgetting the tell-tale resemblance of the wretched mulatto boy to his tormentor. He was not surprised. No doubt, no doubt. What of that? In a jovial tone he assured me that there must be many of that sort. The elder Jacobus had been a bachelor all his life. A highly respectable bachelor. But there had never been open scandal in that connection. His life had been quite regular. It could cause no offence to anyone.

I said that I had been offended considerably. My interlocutor opened very wide eyes. Why? Because a mulatto lad got a few knocks? That was not a great affair, surely. I had no idea how insolent and untruthful these half-castes were. In fact, he seemed to think Mr Jacobus rather kind than otherwise to employ that youth at all; a sort of amiable weakness which could be forgiven.

This acquaintance of mine belonged to one of the old French families, descendants of the old colonists; all noble, all impoverished, and living a narrow domestic life in dull, dignified decay. The men, as a rule, occupy inferior posts in Government offices or in business houses. The girls are almost always pretty, ignorant of the world, kind and agreeable and generally bilingual; they prattle innocently both in French and English. The emptiness of their existence passes belief.

I obtained my entry into a couple of such households because some years before, in Bombay, I had occasion to be of use to a pleasant, ineffectual young man who was rather stranded there, not knowing what to do with himself or even how to get home to his island again. It was a matter of two hundred rupees or so, but, when I turned up, the family made a point of showing their gratitude by admitting me to their intimacy. My knowledge of the French language made me specially acceptable. They had meantime managed to marry the fellow to a woman nearly twice his age, comparatively well off: the only profession he was really fit for. But it was not all cakes and ale. The first time I

called on the couple she spied a little spot of grease on the poor devil's pantaloons and made him a screaming scene of reproaches so full of sincere passion that I sat terrified as at a tragedy of Racine.

Of course there was never question of the money I had advanced him; but his sisters, Miss Angele and Miss Mary, and the aunts of both families, who spoke quaint archaic French of pre-Revolution period, and a host of distant relations adopted me for a friend outright in a manner which was almost embarrassing.

It was with the eldest brother (he was employed at a desk in my consignee's office) that I was having this talk about the merchant Jacobus. He regretted my attitude and nodded his head sagely. An influential man. One never knew when one would need him. I expressed my immense preference for the shopkeeper of the two. At that my friend looked grave.

'What on earth are you pulling that long face about?' I cried impatiently. 'He asked me to see his garden and I have a good mind to go some day.'

'Don't do that,' he said, so earnestly that I burst into a fit of laughter; but he looked at me without a smile.

This was another matter altogether. At one time the public conscience of the island had been mightily troubled by my Jacobus. The two brothers had been partners for years in great harmony, when a wandering circus came to the island and my Jacobus became suddenly infatuated with one of the lady-riders. What made it worse was that he was married. He had not even the grace to conceal his passion. It must have been strong indeed to carry away such a large, placid creature. His behaviour was perfectly scandalous. He followed that woman to the Cape, and apparently travelled at the tail of that beastly circus to other parts of the world, in a most degrading position. The woman soon ceased to care for him, and treated him worse than a dog. Most extraordinary stories of moral degradation were reaching the island at that time. He had not the strength of mind to shake himself free . . .

The grotesque image of a fat, pushing ship-chandler, enslaved by an unholy love-spell, fascinated me; and I listened rather open-mouthed to the tale as old as the world, a tale which had been the subject of legend, of moral fables, of poems, but which so ludicrously failed to fit the personality. What a strange victim for the gods!

Meantime his deserted wife had died. His daughter was taken care of

by his brother, who married her as advantageously as was possible in the circumstances.

'Oh! The Mrs Doctor!' I exclaimed.

'You know that? Yes. A very able man. He wanted a lift in the world, and there was a good bit of money from her mother, besides the expectations... Of course, they don't know him,' he added. 'The doctor nods in the street, I believe, but he avoids speaking to him when they meet on board a ship, as must happen sometimes.'

I remarked that this surely was an old story by now.

My friend assented. But it was Jacobus's own fault that it was neither forgiven nor forgotten. He came back ultimately. But how? Not in a spirit of contrition, in a way to propitiate his scandalised fellow citizens. He must needs drag along with him a child—a girl...

'He spoke to me of a daughter who lives with him,' I observed, very

much interested.

'She's certainly the daughter of the circus-woman,' said my friend. 'She may be his daughter too; I am willing to admit that she is. In fact, I have no doubt——'

But he did not see why she should have been brought into a respectable community to perpetuate the memory of the scandal. And that was not the worst. Presently something much more distressing happened. That abandoned woman turned up. Landed from a mail-boat . . .

'What! Here? To claim the child, perhaps,' I suggested.

'Not she!' My friendly informant was very scornful. 'Imagine a painted, haggard, agitated, desperate hag. Been cast off in Mozambique by somebody who paid her passage here. She had been injured internally by a kick from a horse; she hadn't a cent on her when she got ashore; I don't think she even asked to see the child. At any rate, not till the last day of her life. Jacobus hired for her a bungalow to die in. He got a couple of Sisters from the hospital to nurse her through these few months. If he didn't marry her in extremis as the good Sisters tried to bring about, it's because she wouldn't even hear of it. As the nuns said, "The woman died impenitent." It was reported that she ordered Jacobus out of the room with her last breath. This may be the real reason why he didn't go into mourning himself; he only put the child into black. While she was little she was to be seen sometimes about the streets attended by a Negro woman, but since she became of age to put her hair up I don't think she has set foot

outside that garden once. She must be over eighteen now.'

Thus my friend, with some added details; such as, that he didn't think the girl had spoken to three people of any position in the island; that an elderly female relative of the brothers Jacobus had been induced by extreme poverty to accept the position of *gouvernante* to the girl. As to Jacobus's business (which certainly annoyed his brother) it was a wise choice on his part. It brought him in contact only with strangers of passage; whereas any other would have given rise to all sorts of awkwardness with his social equals. The man was not wanting in a certain tact—only he was naturally shameless. For why did he want to keep that girl with him? It was most painful for everybody.

I thought suddenly (and with profound disgust) of the other Ja-

cobus, and I could not refrain from saying slyly:

'I suppose if he employed her, say, as a scullion in his household, and occasionally pulled her hair or boxed her ears, the position would have been more regular—less shocking to the respectable class to which he belongs.'

He was not so stupid as to miss my intention, and shrugged his

shoulders impatiently.

'You don't understand. To begin with, she's not a mulatto. And a scandal is a scandal. People should be given a chance to forget. I daresay it would have been better for her if she had been turned into a scullion or something of that kind. Of course he's trying to make money in every sort of petty way, but in such a business there'll never be enough for anybody to come forward.'

When my friend left me I had a conception of Jacobus and his daughter existing, a lonely pair of castaways, on a desert island; the girl sheltering in the house as if it were a cavern in a cliff, and Jacobus going out to pick up a living for both on the beach—exactly like two shipwrecked people who always hope for some rescuer to bring them back at last into touch with the rest of mankind.

But Jacobus's bodily reality did not fit in with this romantic view. When he turned up on board in the usual course, he sipped the cup of coffee placidly, asked me if I was satisfied—and I hardly listened to the harbour gossip he dropped slowly in his low, voice-saving enunciation. I had then troubles of my own. My ship chartered, my thoughts dwelling on the success of a quick round voyage, I had been suddenly confronted by a shortage of bags. A catastrophe! The stock of one

especial kind, called pockets, seemed to be totally exhausted. A consignment was shortly expected—it was afloat, on its way, but, meantime, the loading of my ship dead stopped, I had enough to worry about. My consignees, who had received me with such heartiness on my arrival, now, in the character of my charterers, listened to my complaints with polite helplessness. Their manager, the old-maidish, thin man, who so prudishly didn't even like to speak about the impure Jacobus, gave me the correct commercial view of the position.

'My dear Captain'—he was retracting his leathery cheeks into a condescending, shark-like smile—'we were not morally obliged to tell you of a possible shortage before you signed the charter-party. It was for you to guard against the contingency of a delay—strictly speaking. But of course we shouldn't have taken any advantage. This is no one's fault really. We ourselves have been taken unawares,' he concluded primly,

with an obvious lie.

This lecture I confess had made me thirsty. Suppressed rage generally produces that effect; and as I strolled on aimlessly I bethought myself of the tall earthenware pitcher in the captains' room of the Jacobus 'store'.

With no more than a nod to the men I found assembled there, I poured down a deep, cool draught on my indignation, then another, and then, becoming dejected, I sat plunged in cheerless reflections. The others read, talked, smoked, bandied over my head some unsubtle chaff. But my abstraction was respected. And it was without a word to anyone that I rose and went out, only to be quite unexpectedly accosted in the bustle of the store by Jacobus the outcast.

'Glad to see you, Captain. What? Going away? You haven't been looking so well these last few days, I notice. Run down, eh?'

He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his words were in the usual course of business, but they had a human note. It was commercial amenity, but I had been a stranger to amenity in that connection. I do verily believe (from the direction of his heavy glance towards a certain shelf) that he was going to suggest the purchase of Clarkson's Nerve Tonic, which he kept in stock, when I said impulsively:

'I am rather in trouble with my loading.'

Wide awake under his sleepy, broad mask with glued lips, he understood at once, had a movement of the head so appreciative that I relieved my exasperation by exclaiming:

'Surely there must be eleven hundred quarter-bags to be found in the colony. It's only a matter of looking for them.'

Again that slight movement of the big head, and in the noise and

activity of the store that tranquil murmur:

'To be sure. But then people likely to have a reserve of quarter-bags wouldn't want to sell. They'd need that size themselves.'

"That's exactly what my consignees are telling me. Impossible to buy. Bosh! They don't want to. It suits them to have the ship hung up. But if I were to discover the lot they would have to—— Look here, Jacobus! You are the man to have such a thing up your sleeve.'

He protested with a ponderous swing of his big head. I stood before him helplessly, being looked at by those heavy eyes with a veiled expression as of a man after some soul-shaking crisis. Then, suddenly:

'It's impossible to talk quietly here,' he whispered. 'I am very busy. But if you could go and wait for me in my house. It's less than ten min-

utes' walk. Oh yes, you don't know the way.'

He called for his coat and offered to take me there himself. He would have to return to the store at once for an hour or so to finish his business, and then he would be at liberty to talk over with me that matter of quarter-bags. This programme was breathed out at me through slightly parted, still lips; his heavy, motionless glance rested upon me, placid as ever, the glance of a tired man—but I felt that it was searching too. I could not imagine what he was looking for in me and kept silent, wondering.

'I am asking you to wait for me in my house till I am at liberty to talk this matter over. You will?'

'Why, of course!' I cried.

'But I cannot promise——'

'I daresay not,' I said. 'I don't expect a promise.'

'I mean I can't even promise to try the move I've in my mind. One must see first . . . h'm!'

'All right. I'll take the chance. I'll wait for you as long as you like. What else have I to do in this infernal hole of a port!'

Before I had uttered my last words we had set off at a swinging pace. We turned a couple of corners and entered a street completely empty of traffic, of semi-rural aspect, paved with cobblestones nestling in grass tufts. The house came to the line of the roadway: a single storey on an elevated basement of rough stones, so that our heads were below the

level of the windows as we went along. All the jalousies were tightly shut, like eyes, and the house seemed fast asleep in the afternoon sunshine. The entrance was at the side, in an alley even more grass-grown than the street: a small door, simply on the latch.

With a word of apology as to showing me the way, Jacobus preceded me up a dark passage and led me across the naked parquet floor of what I supposed to be the dining-room. It was lighted by three glass doors which stood wide open on to a verandah or rather loggia running its brick arches along the garden side of the house. It was really a magnificent garden: smooth green lawns and a gorgeous maze of flower-beds in the foreground, displayed around a basin of dark water framed in a marble rim, and in the distance the massed foliage of varied trees concealing the roofs of other houses. The town might have been miles away. It was a brilliantly coloured solitude, drowsing in a warm, voluptuous silence. Where the long, still shadows fell across the beds, and in shady nooks, the massed colours of the flowers had an extraordinary magnificence of effect. I stood entranced. Jacobus grasped me delicately above the elbow, impelling me to a half-turn to the left.

I had not noticed the girl before. She occupied a low, deep, wickerwork armchair, and I saw her in exact profile like a figure in a tapestry,

and as motionless. Jacobus released my arm.

'This is Alice,' he announced tranquilly; and his subdued manner of speaking made it sound so much like a confidential communication that I fancied myself nodding understandingly and whispering, 'I see, I see.'... Of course, I did nothing of the kind. Neither of us did anything; we stood side by side looking down at the girl. For quite a time she did not stir, staring straight before her as if watching the vision of some pageant passing through the garden in the deep, rich glow of light and the splendour of flowers.

Then, coming to the end of her reverie, she looked round and up. If I had not at first noticed her, I am certain that she too had been unaware of my presence till she actually perceived me by her father's side. The quickened upward movement of the heavy eyelids, the widening of the languid glance, passing into a fixed stare, put that beyond doubt.

Under her amazement there was a hint of fear, and then came a flash as of anger. Jacobus, after uttering my name fairly loud, said, 'Make yourself at home, Captain—I won't be gone long,' and went away

rapidly. Before I had time to make a bow I was left alone with the girl, who, I remembered suddenly, had not been seen by any man or woman of that town since she had found it necessary to put up her hair. It looked as though it had not been touched again since that distant time of first putting up; it was a mass of black, lustrous locks, twisted anyhow high on her head, with long, untidy wisps hanging down on each side of the clear, sallow face; a mass so thick and strong and abundant that, nothing but to look at, it gave you a sensation of heavy pressure on the top of your head and an impression of magnificently cynical untidiness. She leaned forward, hugging herself with crossed legs; a dingy, amber-coloured, flounced wrapper of some thin stuff revealed the young, supple body drawn together tensely in the deep, low seat as if crouching for a spring. I detected a slight, quivering start or two, which looked uncommonly like bounding away. They were followed by the most absolute immobility.

The absurd impulse to run out after Jacobus (for I had been startled too) once repressed, I took a chair, placed it not very far from her, sat down deliberately, and began to talk about the garden, caring not what I said, but using a gentle caressing intonation as one talks to soothe a startled wild animal. I could not even be certain that she understood me. She never raised her face nor attempted to look my way. I kept on talking only to prevent her from taking flight. She had another of those quivering, repressed starts which made me catch my breath with apprehension.

Ultimately I formed a notion that what prevented her perhaps from going off in one great, nervous leap was the scantiness of her attire. The wicker armchair was the most substantial thing about her person. What she had on under that dingy, loose, amber wrapper must have been of the most flimsy and airy character. One could not help being aware of it. It was obvious. I felt it actually embarrassing at first; but that sort of embarrassment is got over easily by a mind not enslaved by narrow prejudices. I did not avert my gaze from Alice. I went on talking with ingratiating softness, the recollection that, most likely, she had never before been spoken to by a strange man adding to my assurance. I don't know why an emotional tenseness should have crept into the situation. But it did. And just as I was becoming aware of it a slight scream cut short my flow of urbane speech.

The scream did not proceed from the girl. It was emitted behind me,

and caused me to turn my head sharply. I understood at once that the apparition in the doorway was the elderly relation of Jacobus, the companion, the *gouvernante*. While she remained thunderstruck, I got up and made her a low bow.

The ladies of Jacobus's household evidently spent their days in light attire. This stumpy old woman with a face like a large, wrinkled lemon, beady eyes, and a shock of iron-grey hair, was dressed in a garment of some ash-coloured, silky, light stuff. It fell from her thick neck down to her toes with the simplicity of an unadorned nightgown. It made her appear truly cylindrical. She exclaimed, 'How did you get here?'

Before I could say a word she vanished, and presently I heard a confusion of shrill protestations in a distant part of the house. Obviously no one could tell her how I got there. In a moment, with great outcries from two Negro women following her, she waddled back to the door-

way, infuriated.

'What do you want here?'

I turned to the girl. She was sitting straight up now, her hands posed on the arms of the chair. I appealed to her.

'Surely, Miss Alice, you will not let them drive me out into the street?'

Her magnificent black eyes, narrowed, long in shape, swept over me with an indefinable expression; then in a harsh, contemptuous voice she let fall in French a sort of explanation:

'C'est papa.'

I made another low bow to the old woman.

She turned her back on me in order to drive away her black henchwomen; then, surveying my person in a peculiar manner with one small eye nearly closed and her face all drawn up on that side as if with a twinge of toothache, she stepped out on the verandah, sat down in a rocking-chair some distance away, and took up her knitting from a little table. Before she started at it she plunged one of the needles into the mop of her grey hair and stirred it vigorously.

Her elementary nightgown-sort of frock clung to her ancient, stumpy, and floating form. She wore white cotton stockings and flat, brown velvet slippers. Her feet and ankles were obtrusively visible on the foot-rest. She began to rock herself slightly, while she knitted. I had resumed my seat and kept quiet, for I mistrusted that old woman. What if she ordered me to depart? She seemed capable of any outrage. She had

snorted once or twice; she was knitting violently. Suddenly she piped at the young girl in French a question which I translate colloquially:

'What's your father up to now?'

The young creature shrugged her shoulders so comprehensively that her whole body swayed within the loose wrapper; and in that unexpectedly harsh voice, which yet had a seductive quality to the senses, like certain kinds of natural rough wines one drinks with pleasure:

'It's some captain. Leave me alone-will you!'

The chair rocked quicker; the old, thin voice was like a whistle.

'You and your father make a pair. He would stick at nothing—that's well known. But I didn't expect this.'

I thought it high time to air some of my own French. I remarked modestly, but firmly, that this was business. I had some matters to talk over with Mr Jacobus.

At once she piped out a derisive 'Poor innocent!' Then, with a change of tone, 'The shop's for business. Why don't you go to the shop to talk with him?'

The furious speed of her fingers and knitting-needles made one dizzy; and with squeaky indignation:

'Sitting here staring at that girl—is that what you call business?'

'No,' I said suavely. 'I call this pleasure—an unexpected pleasure. And unless Miss Alice objects——'

I half turned to her. She flung at me an angry and contemptuous 'Don't care!' and, leaning her elbow on her knees, took her chin in her hand—a Jacobus chin undoubtedly. And those heavy eyelids, this black, irritated stare reminded me of Jacobus too—the wealthy merchant, the respected one. The design of her eyebrows also was the same, rigid and ill-omened. Yes! I traced in her a resemblance to both of them. It came to me as a sort of surprising remote inference that both these Jacobuses were rather handsome men after all. I said:

'Oh! Then I shall stare at you till you smile.'

She favoured me again with an even more viciously scornful 'Don't care!'

The old woman broke in blunt and shrill:

'Hear his impudence! And you too! Don't care! Go at least and put some more clothes on. Sitting there like this before this sailor riff-raff.'

The sun was about to leave the Pearl of the Ocean for other seas, for other lands. The walled garden full of shadows blazed with colour

as if the flowers were giving up the light absorbed during the day. The amazing old woman became very explicit. She suggested to the girl a corset and a petticoat with a cynical unreserve which humiliated me. Was I of no more account than a wooden dummy? The girl snapped out, 'Shan't!'

It was not the naughty retort of a vulgar child; it had a note of desperation. Clearly my intrusion had somehow upset the balance of their established relations. The old woman knitted with furious accuracy, her eyes fastened down on her work.

'Oh, you are the true child of your father! And *that* talks of entering a convent! Letting herself be stared at by a fellow.'

'Leave off.'

'Shameless thing!'

'Old sorceress,' the girl uttered distinctly, preserving her meditative pose, chin in hand, and a far-away stare over the garden.

It was like the quarrel of the kettle and the pot. The old woman flew out of the chair, banged down her work, and with a great play of thick limb perfectly visible in that weird, clinging garment of hers, strode at the girl—who never stirred. I was experiencing a sort of trepidation when, as if awed by that unconscious attitude, the aged relative of Jacobus turned short upon me.

She was, I perceived, armed with a knitting-needle; and as she raised her hand her intention seemed to be to throw it at me like a dart. But she only used it to scratch her head with, examining me the while at close range, one eye nearly shut and her face distorted by a whimsical, one-sided grimace.

'My dear man,' she asked abruptly, 'do you expect any good to come of this?'

'I do hope so indeed, Miss Jacobus.' I tried to speak in the easy tone of an afternoon caller. 'You see, I am here after some bags.'

'Bags! Look at that now! Didn't I hear you holding forth to that graceless wretch?'

'You would like to see me in my grave,' uttered the motionless girl hoarsely.

'Grave! What about me? Buried alive before I am dead for the sake of a thing blessed with such a pretty father!' she cried; and turning to me, 'You're one of those men he does business with. Well—why don't you leave us in peace, my good fellow?'

It was said in a tone—this 'leave us in peace'. There was a sort of ruffianly familiarity, a superiority, a scorn in it. I was to hear it more than once, for you would show an imperfect knowledge of human nature if you thought that this was my last visit to that house—where no respectable person had put foot for ever so many years. No, you would be very much mistaken if you imagined that this reception had scared me away. First of all, I was not going to run before a grotesque and ruffianly old woman.

And then you mustn't forget these necessary bags. That first evening Jacobus made me stay to dinner; after, however, telling me loyally that he didn't know whether he could do anything at all for me. He had been thinking it over. It was too difficult, he feared . . . But he did not give it

up in so many words.

We were only three at table; the girl by means of repeated 'Won'tl' 'Shan'tl' and 'Don't carel' having conveyed and affirmed her intention not to come to the table, not to have any dinner, not to move from the verandah. The old relative hopped about in her flat slippers and piped indignantly; Jacobus towered over her and murmured placidly in his throat; I joined jocularly from a distance, throwing in a few words, for which under the cover of the night I received secretly a most vicious poke in the ribs from the old woman's elbow or perhaps her fist. I restrained a cry. And all the time the girl didn't even condescend to raise her head to look at any of us. All this may sound childish—and yet that stony, petulant sullenness had an obscurely tragic flavour.

And so we sat down to the food around the light of a good many candles while she remained crouching out there, staring in the dark as if feeding her bad temper on the heavily scented air of the admirable

garden.

Before leaving, I said to Jacobus that I would come next day to hear if the bag affair had made any progress. He shook his head slightly at that.

'I'll haunt your house daily till you pull it off. You'll be always finding me here.'

His faint, melancholy smile did not part his thick lips.

'That will be all right, Captain.'

Then seeing me to the door, very tranquil, he murmured earnestly the recommendation, 'Make yourself at home,' and also the hospitable hint about there being always 'a plate of soup'. It was only on my way to the quay, down the ill-lighted streets, that I remembered I had been engaged to dine that very evening with the S—— family. Though vexed with my forgetfulness (it would be rather awkward to explain) I couldn't help thinking that it had procured me a more amusing evening. And besides—business. The sacred business——

In a barefooted Negro who overtook me at a run and bolted down the landing-steps I recognised Jacobus's boatman, who must have been feeding in the kitchen. His usual 'Goodnight, sah!' as I went up my ship's ladder had a more cordial sound than on previous occasions.



I kept my word to Jacobus. I haunted his home. He was perpetually finding me there of an afternoon when he popped in for a moment from the 'store'. The sound of my voice talking to his Alice greeted him on his doorstep; and when he returned for good in the evening, ten to one he would hear it still going on in the verandah. I just nodded to him; he would sit down heavily and gently, and watch with a sort of approving anxiety my efforts to make his daughter smile.

I called her often 'Alice', right before him; sometimes I would address her as Miss 'Don't Care', and I exhausted myself in nonsensical chatter without succeeding once in taking her out of her peevish and tragic self. There were moments when I felt I must break out and start swearing at her till all was blue. And I fancied that had I done so Jacobus would not have moved a muscle. A sort of shady, intimate understanding seemed to have been established between us.

I must say the girl treated her father exactly in the same way as she treated me.

And how could it have been otherwise? She treated me as she treated her father. She had never seen a visitor. She did not know how men behaved. I belonged to the low lot with whom her father did business at the port. I was of no account. So was her father. The only decent people in the world were the people of the island, who would have nothing to do with him because of something wicked he had done. This was apparently the explanation Miss Jacobus had given her of the household's isolated position. For she had to be told something! And I feel convinced that this version had been assented to by Jacobus. I must

say the old woman was putting it forward with considerable gusto. It was on her lips the universal explanation, the universal allusion, the universal taunt.

One day Jacobus came in early and, beckoning me into the diningroom, wiped his brow with a weary gesture and told me that he had managed to unearth a supply of quarter-bags.

'It's fourteen hundred your ship wanted, did you say, Captain?'

'Yes, yes!' I replied eagerly; but he remained calm. He looked more tired than I had ever seen him before.

'Well, Captain, you may go and tell your people that they can get that lot from my brother.'

As I remained open-mouthed at this, he added his usual placid formula of assurance:

'You'll find it correct, Captain.'

'You spoke to your brother about it?' I was distinctly awed. 'And for me? Because he must have known that my ship's the only one hung up for bags. How on earth——'

He wiped his brow again. I noticed that he was dressed with unusual care, in clothes in which I had never seen him before. He avoided my eye.

'You've heard people talk, of course . . . That's true enough. He . . . I . . . we certainly . . . for several years . . .' His voice declined to a mere sleepy murmur. 'You see I had something to tell him of, something which——'

His murmur stopped. He was not going to tell me what this something was. And I didn't care. Anxious to carry the news to my charterers, I ran back on the verandah to get my hat.

At the bustle I made the girl turned her eyes slowly in my direction, and even the old woman was checked in her knitting. I stopped a moment to exclaim excitedly:

'Your father's a brick, Miss Don't Care. That's what he is.'

She beheld my elation in scornful surprise. Jacobus, with unwonted familiarity, seized my arm as I flew through the dining-room, and breathed heavily at me a proposal about 'A plate of soup' that evening. I answered distractedly, 'Eh? What? Oh, thanks! Certainly. With pleasure,' and tore myself away. Dine with him? Of course. The merest gratitude——

But some three hours afterwards, in the dusky, silent street, paved

with cobble-stones, I became aware that it was not mere gratitude which was guiding my steps towards the house with the old garden, where for years no guest other than myself had ever dined. Mere gratitude does not gnaw at one's interior economy in that particular way. Hunger might; but I was not feeling particularly hungry for Jacobus's food.

On that occasion, too, the girl refused to come to the table.

My exasperation grew. The old woman cast malicious glances at me. I said suddenly to Jacobus, 'Here! Put some chicken and salad on that plate.' He obeyed without raising his eyes. I carried it with a knife and fork and a serviette out on the verandah. The garden was one mass of gloom, like a cemetery of flowers buried in the darkness, and she, in the chair, seemed to muse mournfully over the extinction of light and colour. Only whiffs of heavy scent passed like wandering, fragrant souls of that departed multitude of blossoms. I talked volubly, jocularly, persuasively, tenderly; I talked in a subdued tone. To a listener it would have sounded like the murmur of a pleading lover. Whenever I paused expectantly there was only a deep silence. It was like offering food to a seated statue.

'I haven't been able to swallow a single morsel thinking of you out here starving yourself in the dark. It's positively cruel to be so obstinate. Think of my sufferings.'

'Don't care.'

I felt as if I could have done her some violence—shaken her, beaten her, maybe. I said:

'Your absurd behaviour will prevent me coming here any more.'

'What's that to me?'

'You like it.'

'It's false,' she snarled.

My hand fell on her shoulder; and if she had flinched I verily believe I would have shaken her. But there was no movement, and this immobility disarmed my anger.

'You do. Or you wouldn't be found on the verandah every day. Why are you here, then? There are plenty of rooms in the house. You have your own room to stay in—if you did not want to see me. But you do. You know you do.'

I felt a slight shudder under my hand and released my grip as if frightened by that sign of animation in her body. The scented air of the

garden came to us in a warm wave like a voluptuous and perfumed sigh.

'Go back to them,' she whispered, almost pitifully.

As I re-entered the dining-room I saw Jacobus cast down his eyes. I banged the plate on the table. At this demonstration of ill humour he murmured something in an apologetic tone, and I turned on him viciously as if he were accountable to me for these 'abominable eccentricities', I believe I called them.

'But I daresay Miss Jacobus here is responsible for most of this

offensive manner,' I added loftily.

She piped out at once in her brazen, ruffianly manner: 'Eh? Why don't you leave us in peace, my good fellow?'

I was astonished that she should dare before Jacobus. Yet what could he have done to repress her? He needed her too much. He raised a heavy, drowsy glance for an instant, then looked down again. She insisted with shrill finality:

'Haven't you done your business, you two? Well, then---'

She had the true Jacobus impudence, that old woman. Her mop of iron-grey hair was parted on the side like a man's, raffishly, and she made as if to plunge her fork into it, as she used to do with the knittingneedle, but refrained. Her little black eyes sparkled venomously. I turned to my host at the head of the table—menacingly, as it were.

'Well, and what do you say to that, Jacobus? Am I to take it that we

have done with each other?'

I had to wait a little. The answer when it came was rather unexpected, and in quite another spirit than the question.

'I certainly think we might do some business yet with those potatoes of mine, Captain. You will find that——'

I cut him short.

'I've told you before that I don't trade.'

His broad chest heaved without a sound in a noiseless sigh.

'Think it over, Captain,' he murmured, tenacious and tranquil; and I burst into a jarring laugh, remembering how he had stuck to the circusrider woman—the depth of passion under that placid surface, which even cuts with a riding-whip (so the legend had it) could never ruffle into the semblance of a storm; something like the passion of a fish would be if one could imagine such a thing as a passionate fish.

That evening I experienced more distinctly than ever the sense of moral discomfort which always attended me in that house lying under the ban of all 'decent' people. I refused to stay on and smoke after dinner; and when I put my hand into the thickly cushioned palm of Jacobus, I said to myself that it would be for the last time under his roof. I pressed his bulky paw heartily, nevertheless. Hadn't he got me out of a serious difficulty? To the few words of acknowledgement I was bound, and indeed quite willing, to utter, he answered by stretching his closed lips in his melancholy, glued-together smile.

'That will be all right, I hope, Captain,' he breathed out weightily.

'What do you mean?' I asked, alarmed. 'That your brother might yet----'

'Oh no,' he reassured me. 'He . . . he's a man of his word, Captain.'

My self-communion as I walked away from his door, trying to believe that this was for the last time, was not satisfactory. I was aware myself that I was not sincere in my reflections as to Jacobus's motives, and, of course, the very next day I went back again.

How weak, irrational, and absurd we are! How easily carried away whenever our awakened imagination brings us the irritating hint of a desire! I cared for the girl in a particular way, seduced by the moody expression of her face, by her obstinate silences, her rare, scornful words; by the perpetual pout of her closed lips, the black depths of her fixed gaze turned slowly upon me as if in contemptuous provocation, only to be averted next moment with an exasperating indifference.

Of course the news of my assiduity had spread all over the little town. I noticed a change in the manner of my acquaintances and even something different in the nods of the other captains, when meeting them at the landing-steps or in the offices where business called me. The old-maidish head clerk treated me with distant punctiliousness and, as it were, gathered his skirts round him for fear of contamination. It seemed to me that the very niggers on the quays turned to look after me as I passed; and as to Jacobus's boatman his 'Goodnight, sah!' when he put me on board was no longer merely cordial—it had a familiar, confidential sound as though we had been partners in some villainy.

My friend S—— the elder passed me on the other side of the street with a wave of the hand and an ironic smile. The younger brother, the one they had married to an elderly shrew, he, on the strength of an older friendship and as if paying a debt of gratitude, took the liberty to utter a word of warning.

'You're doing yourself no good by your choice of friends, my dear

chap,' he said, with infantile gravity.

As I knew that the meeting of the brothers Jacobus was the subject of excited comment in the whole of the sugary Pearl of the Ocean I wanted to know why I was blamed.

'I have been the occasion of a move which may end in a reconciliation surely desirable from the point of view of the proprieties—don't

you know?'

'Of course, if that girl were disposed of it would certainly facilitate —' he mused sagely, then, inconsequential creature, gave me a light tap on the lower part of my waistcoat. 'You old sinner,' he cried jovially, 'much you care for proprieties. But you had better look out for yourself, you know, with a personage like Jacobus who has no sort of reputation to lose.'

He had recovered his gravity of a respectable citizen by that time and

added regretfully:

'All the women of our family are perfectly scandalised.'

But by that time I had given up visiting the S— family and the D— family. The elder ladies pulled such faces when I showed myself, and the multitude of related young ladies received me with such a variety of looks: wondering, awed, mocking (except Miss Mary, who spoke to me and looked at me with hushed, pained compassion as though I had been ill), that I had no difficulty in giving them all up. I would have given up the society of the whole town for the sake of sitting near that girl, snarling and superb and barely clad in that flimsy, dingy, amber wrapper, open low at the throat. She looked, with the wild wisps of hair hanging down her tense face, as though she had just jumped out of bed in the panic of a fire.

She sat leaning on her elbow, looking at nothing. Why did she stay listening to my absurd chatter? And not only that; but why did she powder her face in preparation for my arrival? It seemed to be her idea of making a toilette, and in her untidy negligence a sign of great effort

towards personal adornment.

But I might have been mistaken. The powdering might have been her daily practice and her presence in the verandah a sign of an indifference so complete as to take no account of my existence. Well, it was all one to me.

I loved to watch her slow changes of pose, to look at her long im-

mobilities composed in the graceful lines of her body, to observe the mysterious narrow stare of her splendid black eyes, somewhat long in shape, half closed, contemplating the void. She was like a spellbound creature with the forehead of a goddess crowned by the dishevelled magnificent hair of a gypsy tramp. Even her indifference was seductive. I felt myself growing attached to her by the bond of an irrealisable desire, for I kept my head—quite. And I put up with the moral discomfort of Jacobus's sleepy watchfulness, tranquil, and yet so expressive; as if there had been a tacit pact between us two. I put up with the insolence of the old woman's, 'Aren't you ever going to leave us in peace, my good fellow?'; with her taunts; with her brazen and sinister scolding. She was of the true Jacobus stock, and no mistake.

Directly I got away from the girl I called myself many hard names. What folly was this? I would ask myself. It was like being the slave of some depraved habit. And I returned to her with my head clear, my heart certainly free, not even moved by pity for that castaway (she was as much of a castaway as anyone ever wrecked on a desert island), but as if beguiled by some extraordinary promise. Nothing more unworthy could be imagined. The recollection of that tremulous whisper when I gripped her shoulder with one hand and held a plate of chicken with the other was enough to make me break all my good resolutions.

Her insulting taciturnity was enough sometimes to make one gnash one's teeth with rage. When she opened her mouth it was only to be abominably rude in harsh tones to the associate of her reprobate father; and the full approval of her aged relative was conveyed to her by offensive chuckles. If not that, then her remarks, always uttered in the tone of scathing contempt, were of the most appalling inanity.

How could it have been otherwise? That plump, ruffianly Jacobus old maid in the tight grey frock had never taught her any manners. Manners, I suppose, are not necessary for born castaways. No educational establishment could ever be induced to accept her as a pupil—on account of the proprieties, I imagine. And Jacobus had not been able to send her away anywhere. How could he have done it? Who with? Where to? He himself was not enough of an adventurer to think of settling down anywhere else. His passion had tossed him at the tail of a circus up and down strange coasts, but, the storm over, he had drifted back shamelessly where, social outcast as he was, he remained still a Jacobus—one of the oldest families on the island, older than the

French even. There must have been a Jacobus in at the death of the last dodo... The girl had learned nothing, she had never listened to a general conversation, she knew nothing, she had heard of nothing. She could read certainly; but all the reading matter that ever came in her way were the newspapers provided for the captains' room of the 'store'. Jacobus had the habit of taking these sheets home now and then in a very stained and ragged condition.

As her mind could not grasp the meaning of any matters treated there except police-court reports and accounts of crimes, she had formed for herself a notion of the civilised world as a scene of murders, abductions, burglaries, stabbing affrays, and every sort of desperate violence. England and France, Paris and London (the only two towns of which she seemed to have heard), appeared to her sinks of abomination, reeking with blood, in contrast to her little island, where petty larceny was about the standard of current misdeeds, with, now and then, some more pronounced crime—and that only amongst the imported coolie labourers on sugar estates or the Negroes of the town. But in Europe these things were being done daily by a wicked population of white men amongst whom, as that ruffianly, aristocratic old Miss Jacobus pointed out, the wandering sailors, the associates of her precious papa, were the lowest of the low.

It was impossible to give her a sense of proportion. I suppose she figured England to herself as about the size of the Pearl of the Ocean; in which case it would certainly have been reeking with gore and a mere wreck of burgled houses from end to end. One could not make her understand that these horrors on which she fed her imagination were lost in the mass of orderly life like a few drops of blood in the ocean. She directed upon me for a moment the uncomprehending glance of her narrowed eyes, and then would turn her scornful powdered face away without a word. She would not even take the trouble to shrug her shoulders.

At that time the batches of papers brought by the last mail reported a series of crimes in the East End of London, there was a sensational case of abduction in France, and a fine display of armed robbery in Australia. One afternoon crossing the dining-room I heard Miss Jacobus piping in the verandah with venomous animosity, 'I don't know what your precious papa is plotting with that fellow. But he's just the sort of man who's capable of carrying you off far away some-

where and then cutting your throat some day for your money.'

There was a good half of the length of the verandah between their chairs. I came out and sat down fiercely midway between them.

'Yes, that's what we do with girls in Europe,' I began in a grimly matter-of-fact tone. I think Miss Jacobus was disconcerted by my sudden appearance. I turned upon her with cold ferocity:

'As to objectionable old women, they are first strangled quietly, then cut up into small pieces and thrown away, a bit here and a bit there. They vanish——'

I cannot go so far as to say I had terrified her. But she was troubled by my truculence, the more so because I had been always addressing her with a politeness she did not deserve. Her plump, knitting hands fell slowly on her knees. She said not a word while I fixed her with severe determination. Then, as I turned away from her at last, she laid down her work gently and, with noiseless movements, retreated from the verandah. In fact, she vanished.

But I was not thinking of her. I was looking at the girl. It was what I was coming for daily; troubled, ashamed, eager; finding in my nearness to her a unique sensation which I indulged with dread, self-contempt, and deep pleasure, as if it were a secret vice bound to end in my undoing, like the habit of some drug or other which ruins and degrades its slave.

I looked her over, from the top of her dishevelled head, down the lovely line of the shoulder, following the curve of the hip, the draped form of the long limb, right down to her fine ankle below a torn, soiled flounce; and as far as the point of the shabby, high-heeled, blue slipper, dangling from her well-shaped foot, which she moved slightly, with quick, nervous jerks, as if impatient of my presence. And in the scent of the massed flowers I seemed to breathe her special and inexplicable charm, the heady perfume of the everlastingly irritated captive of the garden.

I looked at her rounded chin, the Jacobus chin; at the full, red lips pouting in the powdered, sallow face; at the firm modelling of the cheek, the grains of white in the hairs of the straight, sombre eyebrows; at the long eyes, a narrowed gleam of liquid white and intense motionless black, with their gaze so empty of thought and so absorbed in their fixity that she seemed to be staring at her own lonely image in some far-off mirror hidden from my sight amongst the trees.

And suddenly, without looking at me, with the appearance of a person speaking to herself, she asked, in that voice slightly harsh yet mellow and always irritated:

'Why do you keep on coming here?'

'Why do I keep on coming here?' I repeated, taken by surprise. I could not have told her. I could not even tell myself with sincerity why I was coming there. 'What's the good of you asking a question like that?'

'Nothing is any good,' she observed scornfully to the empty air, her chin propped on her hand, that hand never extended to any man, that no one had ever grasped—for I had only grasped her shoulder once—that generous, fine, somewhat masculine hand. I knew well the peculiarly efficient shape—broad at the base, tapering at the fingers—of that hand, for which there was nothing in the world to lay hold of. I pretended to be playful.

'No! But do you really care to know?'

She shrugged indolently her magnificent shoulders, from which the dingy thin wrapper was slipping a little.

'Oh-never mind-never mind!'

There was something smouldering under those airs of lassitude. She exasperated me by the provocation of her nonchalance, by something elusive and defiant in her very form which I wanted to seize. I said roughly:

'Why? Don't you think I should tell you the truth?'

Her eyes glided my way for a sidelong look, and she murmured, moving only her full, pouting lips:

'I think you would not dare.'

'Do you imagine I am afraid of you? What on earth . . . Well, it's possible, after all, that I don't know exactly why I am coming here. Let us say, with Miss Jacobus, that it is for no good. You seem to believe the outrageous things she says, if you do have a row with her now and then.'

She snapped out viciously:

'Who else am I to believe?'

'I don't know,' I had to own, seeing her suddenly very helpless and condemned to moral solitude by the verdict of a respectable community. 'You might believe me, if you chose.'

She made a slight movement, and asked me at once, with an effort as if making an experiment:

'What is the business between you and papa?'

'Don't you know the nature of your father's business? Come! He sells provisions to ships.'

She became rigid again in her crouching pose.

'Not that. What brings you here—to this house?'

'And suppose it's you? You would not call that business? Would you? And now let us drop the subject. It's no use. My ship will be ready for sea the day after tomorrow.'

She murmured a distinctly scared 'So soon,' and, getting up quickly, went to the little table and poured herself a glass of water. She walked with rapid steps and with an indolent swaying of her whole young figure above the hips; when she passed near me I felt with tenfold force the charm of the peculiar, promising sensation I had formed the habit to seek near her. I thought with sudden dismay that this was the end of it; that after one more day I would be no longer able to come into this verandah, sit on this chair, and taste perversely the flavour of contempt in her indolent poses, drink in the provocation of her scornful looks, and listen to the curt, insolent remarks uttered in that harsh and seductive voice. As if my innermost nature had been altered by the action of some moral poison, I felt an abject dread of going to sea.

I had to exercise a sudden self-control, as one puts on a brake, to prevent myself jumping up to stride about, shout, gesticulate, make her a scene. What for? What about? I had no idea. It was just the relief of violence that I wanted; and I lolled back in my chair, trying to keep my lips formed in a smile; that half-indulgent, half-mocking smile which was my shield against the shafts of her contempt and the insulting sallies flung at me by the old woman.

She drank the water at a draught, with the avidity of raging thirst, and let herself fall on the nearest chair, as if utterly overcome. Her attitude, like certain tones of her voice, had in it something masculine: the knees apart in the ample wrapper, the clasped hands hanging between them, her body leaning forward, with drooping head. I stared at the heavy black coil of twisted hair. It was enormous, crowning the bowed head with a crushing and disdained glory. The escaped wisps hung straight down. And suddenly I perceived that the girl was trembling from head to foot, as though that glass of iced water had chilled her to the bone.

'What's the matter now?' I said, startled, but in no very sympathetic mood.

She shook her bowed, overweighted head, and cried in a stifled voice but with a rising inflection:

'Go away! Go away! Go away!'

I got up then and approached her, with a strange sort of anxiety. I looked down at her round, strong neck, then stooped low enough to peep at her face. And I began to tremble a little myself.

'What on earth are you gone wild about, Miss Don't Care?'

She flung herself backwards violently, her head going over the back of the chair. And now it was her smooth, full, palpitating throat that lay exposed to my bewildered stare. Her eyes were nearly closed, with only a horrible white gleam under the lids as if she were dead.

'What has come to you?' I asked in awe. 'What are you terrifying

yourself with?'

She pulled herself together, her eyes open frightfully wide now. The tropical afternoon was lengthening the shadows on the hot, weary earth, the abode of obscure desires, of extravagant hopes, of unimaginable terrors.

'Never mind! Don't care!' Then, after a gasp, she spoke with such frightful rapidity that I could hardly make out the amazing words, 'For if you were to shut me up in an empty place as smooth all round as the palm of my hand, I could always strangle myself with my hair.'

For a moment, doubting my ears, I let this inconceivable declaration sink into me. It is ever impossible to guess at the wild thoughts that pass through the heads of our fellow creatures. What monstrous imaginings of violence could have dwelt under the low forehead of that girl who had been taught to regard her father as 'capable of anything' more in the light of a misfortune than that of a disgrace; as, evidently, something to be resented and feared rather than to be ashamed of? She seemed, indeed, as unaware of shame as of anything else in the world; but in her ignorance, her resentment and fear took a childish and violent shape.

Of course she spoke without knowing the value of words. What could she know of death—she who knew nothing of life? It was merely as the proof of her being beside herself with some odious apprehension, that this extraordinary speech had moved me, not to pity, but to a fascinated, horrified wonder. I had no idea what notion she had of her danger. Some sort of abduction. It was quite possible with the talk of that atrocious old woman. Perhaps she thought she could be carried off, bound hand and foot and even gagged. At that surmise I felt

as if the door of a furnace had been opened in front of me.

'Upon my honour!' I cried. 'You will end by going crazy if you listen to that abominable old aunt of yours——'

I studied her haggard expression, her trembling lips. Her cheeks even seemed sunk a little. But how I, the associate of her disreputable father, the 'lowest of the low' from the criminal Europe, could manage to reassure her I had no conception. She was exasperating.

'Heavens and earth! What do you think I can do?'

'I don't know.'

Her chin certainly trembled. And she was looking at me with extreme attention. I made a step nearer to her chair.

'I shall do nothing. I promise you that. Will that do? Do you understand? I shall do nothing whatever, of any kind; and the day after tomorrow I shall be gone.'

What else could I have said? She seemed to drink in my words with the thirsty avidity with which she had emptied the glass of water. She whispered tremulously, in that touching tone I had heard once before on her lips, and which thrilled me again with the same emotion:

'I would believe you. But what about papa——'

'He be hanged!' My emotion betrayed itself by the brutality of my tone. 'I've had enough of your papa. Are you so stupid as to imagine that I am frightened of him? He can't make me do anything.'

All that sounded feeble to me in the face of her ignorance. But I must conclude that the 'accent of sincerity' has, as some people say, a really irresistible power. The effect was far beyond my hopes—and even beyond my conception. To watch the change in the girl was like watching a miracle—the gradual but swift relaxation of her tense glance, of her stiffened muscles, of every fibre of her body. That black, fixed stare into which I had read a tragic meaning more than once, in which I had found a sombre seduction, was perfectly empty now, void of all consciousness whatever, and not even aware any longer of my presence; it had become a little sleepy, in the Jacobus fashion.

But, man being a perverse animal, instead of rejoicing at my complete success, I beheld it with astounded and indignant eyes. There was something cynical in that unconcealed alteration, the true Jacobus shamelessness. I felt as though I had been cheated in some rather complicated deal into which I had entered against my better judgement. Yes, cheated without any regard for, at least, the forms of decency.

With an easy, indolent, and in its indolence supple, feline movement, she rose from the chair, so provokingly ignoring me now, that for very rage I held my ground within less than a foot of her. Leisurely and tranquil, behaving right before me with the ease of a person alone in a room, she extended her beautiful arms, with her hands clenched, her body swaying, her head thrown back a little, revelling contemptuously in a sense of relief, easing her limbs in freedom after all these days of crouching, motionless poses when she had been so furious and so afraid.

All this with supreme indifference, incredible, offensive, exasperating, like ingratitude doubled with treachery.

I ought to have been flattered, perhaps, but, on the contrary, my anger grew; her movement to pass by me as if I were a wooden post or a piece of furniture, that unconcerned movement brought it to a head.

I won't say I did not know what I was doing, but, certainly, cool reflection had nothing to do with the circumstance that next moment both my arms were round her waist. It was an impulsive action, as one snatches at something falling or escaping; and it had no hypocritical gentleness about it either. She had no time to make a sound, and the first kiss I planted on her closed lips was vicious enough to have been a bite.

She did not resist, and of course I did not stop at one. She let me go on, not as if she were inanimate—I felt her there, close against me, young, full of vigour, of life, a strong, desirable creature, but as if she did not care in the least, in the absolute assurance of her safety, what I did or left undone. Our faces brought close together in this storm of haphazard caresses, her big, black, wide-open eyes looked into mine without the girl appearing either angry or pleased or moved in any way. In that steady gaze which seemed impersonally to watch my madness I could detect a slight surprise, perhaps—nothing more. I showered kisses upon her face, and there did not seem to be any reason why this should not go on for ever.

That thought flashed through my head, and I was on the point of desisting when, all at once, she began to struggle with a sudden violence which all but freed her instantly, which revived my exasperation with her, indeed a fierce desire never to let her go any more. I tightened my embrace in time, gasping out, 'No—you don't!' as if she were my mortal enemy. On her part not a word was said. Putting her hands against

my chest, she pushed with all her might, without succeeding, to break the circle of my arms. Except that she seemed thoroughly awake now, her eyes gave me no clue whatever. To meet her black stare was like looking into a deep well, and I was totally unprepared for her change of tactics. Instead of trying to tear my hands apart, she flung herself upon my breast, and with a downward, undulating, serpentine motion, a quick, sliding dive, she got away from me smoothly. It was all very swift; I saw her pick up the tail of her wrapper and run for the door at the end of the verandah not very gracefully. She appeared to be limping a little—and then she vanished; the door swung behind her so noiselessly that I could not believe it was completely closed. I had a distinct suspicion of her black eye being at the crack to watch what I would do. I could not make up my mind whether to shake my fist in that direction or blow a kiss.

## **6**

Either would have been perfectly consistent with my feelings. I gazed at the door, hesitating, but in the end I did neither. The monition of some sixth sense—the sense of guilt, maybe, that sense which always acts too late, alas!—warned me to look round; and at once I became aware that the conclusion of this tumultuous episode was likely to be a matter of lively anxiety. Jacobus was standing in the doorway of the dining-room. How long he had been there it was impossible to guess; and remembering my struggle with the girl I thought he must have been its mute witness from beginning to end. But this supposition seemed almost incredible. Perhaps that impenetrable girl had heard him come in and had got away in time.

He stepped on to the verandah in his usual manner, heavy-eyed, with glued lips. I marvelled at the girl's resemblance to this man. Those long, Egyptian eyes, that low forehead of a stupid goddess, she had found in the sawdust of the circus; but all the rest of the face, the design and the modelling, the rounded chin, the very lips—all that was Jacobus, fined down, more finished, more expressive.

His thick hand fell on and grasped with force the back of a light chair (there were several standing about), and I perceived the chance of a broken head at the end of all this—most likely. My mortification was

extreme. The scandal would be horrible; that was unavoidable. But how to act so as to satisfy myself I did not know. I stood on my guard and at any rate faced him. There was nothing else for it. Of one thing I was certain, that, however brazen my attitude, it could never equal the

characteristic Jacobus impudence.

He gave me his melancholy, glued smile and sat down. I own I was relieved. The perspective of passing from kisses to blows had nothing particularly attractive in it. Perhaps—perhaps he had seen nothing? He behaved as usual, but he had never before found me alone on the verandah. If he had alluded to it, if he had asked, 'Where's Alice?' or something of the sort, I would have been able to judge from the tone. He would give me no opportunity. The striking peculiarity was that he had never looked up at me yet. 'He knows,' I said to myself confidently. And my contempt for him relieved my disgust with myself.

'You are early home,' I remarked.

'Things are very quiet; nothing doing at the store today,' he explained, with a cast-down air.

'Oh, well, you know, I am off,' I said, feeling that this, perhaps, was the best thing to do.

'Yes,' he breathed out. 'Day after tomorrow.'

This was not what I had meant; but as he gazed persistently on the floor I followed the direction of his glance. In the absolute stillness of the house we stared at the high-heeled slipper the girl had lost in her flight. We stared. It lay overturned.

After what seemed a very long time to me, Jacobus hitched his chair forward, stooped with extended arm, and picked it up. It looked a slender thing in his big, thick hands. It was not really a slipper, but a low shoe of blue, glazed kid, rubbed and shabby. It had straps to go over the instep, but the girl only thrust her feet in, after her slovenly manner. Jacobus raised his eyes from the shoe to look at me.

'Sit down, Captain,' he said at last, in his subdued tone.

As if the sight of that shoe had renewed the spell, I gave up suddenly the idea of leaving the house there and then. It had become impossible. I sat down, keeping my eyes on the fascinating object. Jacobus turned his daughter's shoe over and over in his cushioned paws as if studying the way the thing was made. He contemplated the thin sole for a time; then glancing inside with an absorbed air:

'I am glad I found you here, Captain.'

I answered this by some sort of grunt, watching him covertly. Then I added, 'You won't have much more of me now.'

He was still deep in the interior of that shoe on which my eyes too were resting.

'Have you thought any more of this deal in potatoes I spoke to you about the other day?'

'No, I haven't,' I answered curtly. He checked my movement to rise by an austere, commanding gesture of the hand holding that fatal shoe. I remained seated and glared at him. 'You know I don't trade.'

'You ought to, Captain. You ought to.'

I reflected. If I left that house now I would never see the girl again. And I felt I must see her once more, if only for an instant. It was a need, not to be reasoned with, not to be disregarded. No, I did not want to go away. I wanted to stay for one more experience of that strange, provoking sensation and of indefinite desire, the habit of which had made me—me of all people!—dread the prospect of going to sea.

'Mr Jacobus,' I pronounced slowly, 'do you really think that upon the whole and taking various matters into consideration—I mean everything, do you understand?—it would be a good thing for me to trade,

let us say, with you?'

I waited for a while. He went on looking at the shoe, which he held now crushed in the middle, the worn point of the toe and the high heel protruding on each side of his heavy fist.

'That will be all right,' he said, facing me squarely at last.

'Are you sure?'

'You'll find it quite correct, Captain.' He had uttered his habitual phrases in his usual placid, breath-saving voice and stood my hard, inquisitive stare sleepily without as much as a wink.

'Then let us trade,' I said, turning my shoulder to him. 'I see you are

bent on it.'

I did not want an open scandal, but I thought that outward decency may be bought too dearly at times. I included Jacobus, myself, the whole population of the island, in the same contemptuous disgust as though we had been partners in an ignoble transaction. And the remembered vision at sea, diaphanous and blue, of the Pearl of the Ocean at sixty miles off; the unsubstantial, clear marvel of it, as if evoked by the art of a beautiful and pure magic, turned into a thing of horrors too. Was this the fortune this vaporous and rare apparition had held for me

in its hard heart, hidden within the shape as of fair dreams and mist? Was this my luck?

'I think'—Jacobus became suddenly audible after what seemed the silence of vile meditation—'that you might conveniently take some thirty tons. That would be about the lot, Captain.'

'Would it? The lot! I daresay it would be convenient, but I haven't

got enough money for that.'

I had never seen him so animated.

'No!' he exclaimed, with what I took for the accent of grim menace. 'That's a pity.' He paused, then, unrelenting, 'How much money have you got, Captain?' he enquired, with awful directness.

It was my turn to face him squarely. I did so, and mentioned the amount I could dispose of. And I perceived that he was disappointed. He thought it over, his calculating gaze lost in mine, for quite a long time before he came out in a thoughtful tone with the rapacious suggestion:

'You could draw some more from your charterers. That would be

quite easy, Captain.'

'No, I couldn't,' I retorted brusquely. 'I've drawn my salary up to date, and, besides, the ship's accounts are closed.'

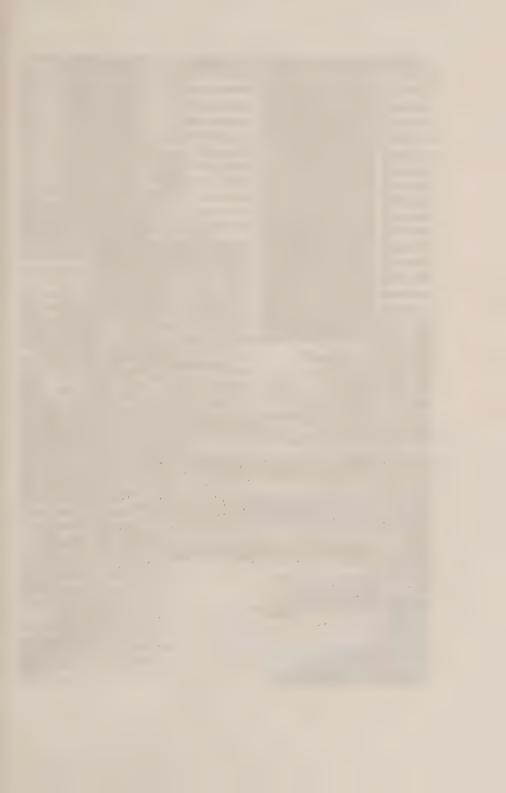
I was growing furious. I pursued, 'And I'll tell you what: if I could do it I wouldn't.' Then, throwing off all restraint, I added, 'You are a bit

too much of a Jacobus, Mr Jacobus.'

The tone alone was insulting enough, but he remained tranquil, only a little puzzled, till something seemed to dawn upon him; but the unwonted light in his eyes died out instantly. As a Jacobus on his native heath, what a mere skipper chose to say could not touch him, outcast as he was. As a ship-chandler he could stand anything. All I caught of his mumble was a vague 'Quite correct,' than which nothing could have been more egregiously false at bottom—to my view, at least. But I remembered—I had never forgotten—that I must see the girl. I did not mean to go. I meant to stay in the house till I had seen her once more.

'Look here!' I said finally. 'I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take as many of your confounded potatoes as my money will buy, on condition that you go off at once down to the wharf to see them loaded in the lighter and sent alongside the ship straight away. Take the invoice and a signed receipt with you. Here's the key of my desk. Give it to Burns. He will

pay you.'





He got up from his chair before I had finished speaking, but he refused to take the key. Burns would never do it. He wouldn't like to ask him even.

'Well, then,' I said, eyeing him slightingly, 'there's nothing for it, Mr Jacobus, but you must wait on board till I come off to settle with you.'

'That will be all right, Captain. I will go at once.'

He seemed at a loss what to do with the girl's shoe he was still holding in his fist. Finally, looking dully at me, he put it down on the chair from which he had risen.

'And you, Captain? Won't you come along, too, just to see-

'Don't bother about me. I'll take care of myself.'

He remained perplexed for a moment, as if trying to understand; and then his weighty, 'Certainly, certainly, Captain,' seemed to be the outcome of some sudden thought. His big chest heaved. Was it a sigh? As he went out to hurry off those potatoes he never looked back at me.

I waited till the noise of his footsteps had died out of the dining-room, and I waited a little longer. Then turning towards the distant door I raised my voice along the verandah:

'Alice!'

Nothing answered me, not even a stir behind the door. Jacobus's house might have been made empty for me to make myself at home in. I did not call again. I had become aware of a great discouragement. I was mentally jaded, morally dejected. I turned to the garden again, sitting down with my elbows spread on the low balustrade, and took my head in my hands.

The evening closed upon me. The shadows lengthened, deepened, mingled together into a pool of twilight in which the flower-beds glowed like coloured embers; whiffs of heavy scent came to me as if the dusk of this hemisphere were but the dimness of a temple and the garden an enormous censer swinging before the altar of the stars. The colours of the blossoms deepened, losing their glow one by one.

The girl, when I turned my head at a slight noise, appeared to me very tall and slender, advancing with a swaying limp, a floating and uneven motion which ended in the sinking of her shadowy form into the deep, low chair. And I don't know why or whence I received the impression that she had come too late. She ought to have appeared at my call. She ought to have . . . It was as if a supreme opportunity had been missed.

I rose and took a seat close to her, nearly opposite her armchair. Her ever-discontented voice addressed me at once, contemptuously:

'You are still here.'

I pitched mine low.

'You have come out at last.'

'I came to look for my shoe—before they bring in the lights.'

It was her harsh, enticing whisper, subdued, not very steady, but its low tremulousness gave me no thrill now. I could only make out the oval of her face, her uncovered throat, the long, white gleam of her eyes. She was mysterious enough. Her hands were resting on the arms of the chair. But where was the mysterious and provoking sensation which was like the perfume of her flower-like youth? I said quietly:

'I have got your shoe here.' She made no sound and I continued,

'You had better give me your foot and I will put it on for you.'

She made no movement. I bent low down and groped for her foot under the flounces of the wrapper. She did not withdraw it and I put on the shoe, buttoning the instep-strap. It was an inanimate foot. I

lowered it gently to the floor.

'If you buttoned the strap you would not be losing your shoe, Miss Don't Care,' I said, trying to be playful without conviction. I felt more like wailing over the lost illusion of vague desire, over the sudden conviction that I would never find again near her the strange, half-evil, half-tender sensation which had given its acrid flavour to so many days, which had made her appear tragic and promising, pitiful and provoking. That was all over.

'Your father picked it up,' I said, thinking she might just as well be

told of the fact.

'I am not afraid of papa—by himself,' she declared scornfully.

'Oh! It's only in conjunction with his disreputable associates, strangers, the "riff-raff of Europe", as your charming aunt or great-aunt says—men like me, for instance—that you——'

'I am not afraid of you,' she snapped out.

'That's because you don't know that I am now doing business with your father. Yes, I am in fact doing exactly what he wants me to do. I've broken my promise to you. That's the sort of man I am. And now—aren't you afraid? If you believe what that dear, kind, truthful old lady says you ought to be.'

It was with unexpected modulated softness that she affirmed:

'No. I am not afraid.' She hesitated . . . 'Not now.'

'Quite right. You needn't be. I shall not see you again before I go to sea.' I rose and stood near her chair. 'But I shall often think of you in this old garden, passing under the trees over there, walking between these gorgeous flower-beds. You must love this garden——'

'I love nothing.'

I heard in her sullen tone the faint echo of that resentfully tragic note which I had found once so provoking. But it left me unmoved except for a sudden and weary conviction of the emptiness of all things under heaven.

'Goodbye, Alice,' I said.

She did not answer, she did not move. To merely take her hand, shake it, and go away seemed impossible, almost improper. I stooped without haste and pressed my lips to her smooth forehead. This was the moment when I realised clearly with a sort of terror my complete detachment from that unfortunate creature. And as I lingered in that cruel self-knowledge I felt the light touch of her arms falling languidly on my neck and received a hasty, awkward, haphazard kiss which missed my lips. No! She was not afraid; but I was no longer moved. Her arms slipped off my neck slowly, she made no sound, the deep wicker armchair creaked slightly; only a sense of my dignity prevented me fleeing headlong from that catastrophic revelation.

I traversed the dining-room slowly. I thought: She's listening to my footsteps; she can't help it; she'll hear me open and shut that door. And I closed it as gently behind me as if I had been a thief retreating with his ill-gotten booty. During that stealthy act I experienced the last touch of emotion in that house, at the thought of the girl I had left sitting there in the obscurity, with her heavy hair and empty eyes as black as the night itself, staring into the walled garden, silent, warm, odorous with the perfume of imprisoned flowers, which, like herself, were lost to sight in a world buried in darkness.

The narrow, ill-lighted, rustic streets I knew so well on my way to the harbour were extremely quiet. I felt in my heart that the further one ventures the better one understands how everything in our life is common, short, and empty; that it is in seeking the unknown in our sensations that we discover how mediocre are our attempts and how soon defeated! Jacobus's boatman was waiting at the steps with an unusual air of readiness. He put me alongside the ship, but did not give me his

confidential 'Good evening, sah,' and, instead of shoving off at once,

remained holding by the ladder.

I was a thousand miles from commercial affairs, when on the dark quarterdeck Mr Burns positively rushed at me, stammering with excitement. He had been pacing the deck distractedly for hours awaiting my arrival. Just before sunset a lighter loaded with potatoes had come alongside with that fat ship-chandler himself sitting on the pile of sacks. He was now stuck immovable in the cabin. What was the meaning of it all? Surely I did not—

'Yes, Mr Burns, I did,' I cut him short. He was beginning to make gestures of despair when I stopped that, too, by giving him the key of my desk and desiring him, in a tone which admitted of no argument, to go below at once, pay Mr Jacobus's bill, and send him out of the ship.

'I don't want to see him,' I confessed frankly, climbing the poop ladder. I felt extremely tired. Dropping on the seat of the skylight, I gave myself up to idle gazing at the lights about the quay and at the black mass of the mountain on the south side of the harbour. I never heard Jacobus leave the ship with every single sovereign of my ready cash in his pocket. I never heard anything till, a long time afterwards, Mr Burns, unable to contain himself any longer, intruded upon me with his ridiculously angry lamentations at my weakness and good nature.

'Of course, there's plenty of room in the after-hatch. But they are sure to go rotten down there. Well! I never heard . . . seventeen tons! I suppose I must hoist in that lot first thing tomorrow morning.'

'I suppose you must. Unless you drop them overboard. But I'm afraid you can't do that. I wouldn't mind myself, but it's forbidden to

throw rubbish into the harbour, you know.'

'That is the truest word you have said for many a day, sir—rubbish. That's just what I expect they are. Nearly eighty good gold sovereigns gone; a perfectly clean sweep of your drawer, sir. Bless me if I understand!'

As it was impossible to throw the right light on this commercial transaction, I left him to his lamentations and under the impression that I was a hopeless fool. Next day I did not go ashore. For one thing, I had no money to go ashore with—no, not enough to buy a cigarette. Jacobus had made a clean sweep. But that was not the only reason. The Pearl of the Ocean had in a few short hours grown odious to me. And I

did not want to meet anyone. My reputation had suffered. I knew I was the object of unkind and sarcastic comments.

The following morning at sunrise, just as our stern-fasts had been let go and the tug plucked us out from between the buoys, I saw Jacobus standing up in his boat. The nigger was pulling hard; several baskets of provisions for ships were stowed between the thwarts. The father of Alice was going his morning round. His countenance was tranquil and friendly. He raised his arm and shouted something with great heartiness. But his voice was of the sort that doesn't carry any distance; all I could catch faintly, or rather guess at, were the words 'next time' and 'quite correct'. And it was only of these last that I was certain. Raising my arm perfunctorily for all response, I turned away. I rather resented the familiarity of the thing. Hadn't I settled accounts finally with him by means of that potato bargain?

This being a harbour story it is not my purpose to speak of our passage. I was glad enough to be at sea, but not with the gladness of old days. Formerly I had no memories to take away with me. I shared in the blessed forgetfulness of sailors, that forgetfulness natural and invincible, which resembles innocence in so far that it prevents self-examination. Now, however, I remembered the girl. During the first few days I was forever questioning myself as to the nature of facts and sensations connected with her person and with my conduct.

And I must say also that Mr Burns's intolerable fussing with those potatoes was not calculated to make me forget the part which I had played. He looked upon it as a purely commercial transaction of a particularly foolish kind, and his devotion—if it was devotion and not mere cussedness, as I came to regard it before long—inspired him with a zeal to minimise my loss as much as possible. Oh yes! He took care of those infamous potatoes with a vengeance, as the saying goes.

Everlastingly, there was a tackle over the after-hatch, and everlastingly the watch on deck were pulling up, spreading out, picking over, rebagging, and lowering down again, some part of that lot of potatoes. My bargain with all its remotest associations, mental and visual—the garden of flowers and scents, the girl with her provoking contempt and her tragic loneliness of a hopeless castaway—was everlastingly dangled before my eyes, for thousands of miles along the open sea. And as if by a satanic refinement of irony it was accompanied by a most awful smell. Whiffs from decaying potatoes pursued me on the poop, they mingled

with my thoughts, with my food, poisoned my very dreams. They made

an atmosphere of corruption for the ship.

I remonstrated with Mr Burns about this excessive care. I would have been well content to batten the hatch down and let them perish under the deck.

That perhaps would have been unsafe. The horrid emanations might have flavoured the cargo of sugar. They seemed strong enough to taint the very ironwork. In addition, Mr Burns made it a personal matter. He assured me he knew how to treat a cargo of potatoes at sea—had been in the trade as a boy, he said. He meant to make my loss as small as possible. What between his devotion—it must have been devotion—and his vanity, I positively dared not give him the order to throw my commercial venture overboard. I believe he would have refused point-blank to obey my lawful command. An unprecedented and comical situation would have been created with which I did not feel equal to deal.

I welcomed the coming of bad weather as no sailor had ever done. When at last I hove the ship to, to pick up the pilot outside Port Philip Heads, the after-hatch had not been opened for more than a week, and I might have believed that no such thing as a potato had ever been on board.

It was an abominable day, raw, blustering, with great squalls of wind and rain; the pilot, a cheery person, looked after the ship and chatted to me, streaming from head to foot; and the heavier the lash of the downpour the more pleased with himself and everything around him he seemed to be. He rubbed his wet hands with a satisfaction which to me, who had stood that kind of thing for several days and nights, seemed inconceivable in any non-aquatic creature.

'You seem to enjoy getting wet, Pilot,' I remarked.

He had a bit of land round his house in the suburbs, and it was of his garden he was thinking. At the sound of the word garden, unheard, unspoken for so many days, I had a vision of gorgeous colour, of sweet scents, of a girlish figure crouching in a chair. Yes. That was a distinct emotion breaking into the peace I had found in the sleepless anxieties of my responsibility during a week of dangerous, bad weather. The Colony, the pilot explained, had suffered from unparalleled drought. This was the first decent drop of water they had had for seven months. The root crops were lost. And, trying to be casual, but with visible

interest, he asked me if I had perchance any potatoes to spare.

Potatoes! I had managed to forget them. In a moment I felt plunged into corruption up to my neck. Mr Burns was making eyes at me behind the pilot's back.

Finally, he obtained a ton, and paid ten pounds for it. This was twice the price of my bargain with Jacobus. The spirit of covetousness woke up in me. That night, in harbour, before I slept, the Custom-House galley came alongside. While his underlings were putting seals on the storerooms, the officer in charge took me aside confidentially. 'I say, Captain, you don't happen to have any potatoes to sell?'

Clearly there was a potato famine in the land. I let him have a ton for twelve pounds, and he went away joyfully. That night I dreamt of a pile of gold in the form of a grave in which a girl was buried, and woke up callous with greed. On calling at my shipbroker's office, that man, after the usual business had been transacted, pushed his spectacles up on his forehead.

'I was thinking, Captain, that coming from the Pearl of the Ocean you may have some potatoes to sell.'

I said negligently, 'Oh yes, I could spare you a ton. Fifteen pounds.'

He exclaimed, 'I say!'—but after studying my face for a while accepted my terms with a faint grimace. It seems that these people could not exist without potatoes. I could. I didn't want to see a potato as long as I lived; but the demon of lucre had taken possession of me. How the news got about I don't know, but, returning on board rather late, I found a small group of men of the coster type hanging about the waist, while Mr Burns walked to and fro the quarterdeck loftily, keeping a triumphant eye on them. They had come to buy potatoes.

'These chaps have been waiting here in the sun for hours,' Burns whispered to me excitedly. 'They have drunk the water-cask dry. Don't you throw away your chances, sir. You are too good-natured.'

I selected a man with thick legs and a man with a cast in his eye to negotiate with; simply because they were easily distinguishable from the rest. 'You have the money on you?' I enquired, before taking them down into the cabin.

'Yes, sir,' they answered in one voice, slapping their pockets. I liked their air of quiet determination. Long before the end of the day all the potatoes were sold at about three times the price I had paid for them. Mr Burns, feverish and exulting, congratulated himself on his skilful

care of my commercial venture, but hinted plainly that I ought to have made more of it.

That night I did not sleep very well. I thought of Jacobus by fits and starts, between snatches of dreams concerned with castaways starving on a desert island covered with flowers. It was extremely unpleasant. In the morning, tired and unrefreshed, I sat down and wrote a long letter to my owners, giving them a carefully thought-out scheme for the ship's employment in the East and about the China Seas for the next two years. I spent the day at that task, and felt somewhat more at peace when it was done.

Their reply came in due course. They were greatly struck with my project; but considering that, notwithstanding the unfortunate difficulty with the bags (which they trusted I would know how to guard against in the future), the voyage showed a very fair profit, they thought it would be better to keep the ship in the sugar trade—at least for the present.

I turned over the page and read on:

We have had a letter from our good friend Mr Jacobus. We are pleased to see how well you have hit it off with him; for, not to speak of his assistance in the unfortunate matter of the bags, he writes us that should you, by using all possible despatch, manage to bring the ship back early in the season he would be able to give us a good rate of freight. We have no doubt that your best endeavours . . . etc. . . . etc.

I dropped the letter and sat motionless for a long time. Then I wrote my answer (it was a short one) and went ashore myself to post it. But I passed one letter-box, then another, and in the end found myself going up Collins Street with the letter still in my pocket—against my heart. Collins Street at four o'clock in the afternoon is not exactly a desert solitude; but I had never felt more isolated from the rest of mankind as when I walked that day its crowded pavement, battling desperately with my thoughts and feeling already vanquished.

There came a moment when the awful tenacity of Jacobus, the man of one passion and of one idea, appeared to me almost heroic. He had not given me up. He had gone again to his odious brother. And then he appeared to me odious himself. Was it for his own sake or for the sake of the poor girl? And on that last supposition the memory of the

kiss which missed my lips appalled me; for whatever he had seen, or guessed at, or risked, he knew nothing of that—unless the girl had told him. How could I go back to fan that fatal spark with my cold breath? No, no, that unexpected kiss had to be paid for at its full price.

At the first letter-box I came to I stopped, and reaching into my breast-pocket I took out the letter—it was as if I were plucking out my very heart—and dropped it through the slit. Then I went straight on

board.

I wondered what dreams I would have that night; but as it turned out I did not sleep at all. At breakfast I informed Mr Burns that I had resigned my command.

He dropped his knife and fork and looked at me with indignation.

'You have, sir! I thought you loved the ship!'

'So I do, Burns,' I said. 'But the fact is that the Indian Ocean and everything that is in it has lost its charm for me. I am going home as passenger by the Suez Canal.'

'Everything that is in it,' he repeated angrily. 'I've never heard anybody talk like this. And to tell you the truth, sir, all the time we have been together I've never quite made you out. What's one ocean more than another? Charm, indeed!'

He was really devoted to me, I believe. But he cheered up when I told him that I had recommended him for my successor.

'Anyhow,' he remarked, 'let people say what they like, this Jacobus has served your turn. I must admit that this potato business has paid extremely well. Of course, if only you had----'

'Yes, Mr Burns,' I interrupted. 'Quite a smile of fortune.'

But I could not tell him that it was driving me out of the ship I had learned to love. And as I sat heavy-hearted at that parting, seeing all my plans destroyed, my modest future endangered—for this command was like a foot in the stirrup for a young man—he gave up completely for the first time his critical attitude.

'A wonderful piece of luck!' he said.



## The Secret Sharer

AN EPISODE FROM THE COAST





On my right hand there were lines of fishing-stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned for ever by some nomad tribe of fishermen now gone to the other end of the ocean; for there was no sign of human habitation as far as the eye could reach. To the left a group of barren islets, suggesting ruins of stone walls, towers, and blockhouses, had its foundations set in a blue sea that itself looked solid, so still and stable did it lie below my feet; even the track of light from the westering sun shone smoothly, without that animated glitter which tells of an imperceptible ripple. And when I turned my head to take a parting glance at the tug which had just left us anchored outside the bar, I saw the straight line of the flat shore joined to the stable sea, edge to edge, with a perfect and unmarked closeness, in one levelled floor half brown, half blue under the enormous dome of the sky. Corresponding in their insignificance to the islets of the sea, two small clumps of trees, one on each side of the only fault in the impeccable joint, marked the mouth of the River Meinam we had just left on the first preparatory stage of our homeward journey; and, far back on the inland level, a larger and loftier mass, the grove surrounding the great Paknam pagoda, was the only thing on which the eye could rest from the vain task of exploring the monotonous sweep of the horizon. Here and there gleams as of a few scattered pieces of silver marked the windings of the great river; and on the nearest of them, just within the bar, the tug steaming right into the land became lost to my sight, hull and funnel and masts, as though the impassive earth had swallowed her up without an effort, without a tremor. My eye followed the light cloud of her smoke, now here, now there, above the plain, according to the devious curves of the stream, but always fainter and further away, till I lost it at last behind the mitreshaped hill of the great pagoda. And then I was left alone with my ship, anchored at the head of the Gulf of Siam.

She floated at the starting-point of a long journey, very still in an immense stillness, the shadows of her spars flung far to the eastward by the setting sun. At that moment I was alone on her decks. There was not a sound in her—and around us nothing moved, nothing lived, not a

canoe on the water, not a bird in the air, not a cloud in the sky. In this breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences to be carried out, far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and for judges.

There must have been some glare in the air to interfere with one's sight, because it was only just before the sun left us that my roaming eyes made out beyond the highest ridge of the principal islet of the group something which did away with the solemnity of perfect solitude. The tide of darkness flowed on swiftly; and with tropical suddenness a swarm of stars came out above the shadowy earth, while I lingered yet, my hand resting lightly on my ship's rail as if on the shoulder of a trusted friend. But, with all that multitude of celestial bodies staring down at one, the comfort of quiet communion with her was gone for good. And there were also disturbing sounds by this time—voices, footsteps forward; the steward flitted along the main deck, a busily ministering spirit; a handbell tinkled urgently under the poop deck...

I found my two officers waiting for me near the supper-table, in the lighted cuddy. We sat down at once, and as I helped the chief mate, I

said:

'Are you aware that there is a ship anchored inside the islands? I saw her mast-heads above the ridge as the sun went down.'

He raised sharply his simple face, overcharged by a terrible growth of whisker, and emitted his usual ejaculations, 'Bless my soul, sir! You don't say so!'

My second mate was a round-cheeked, silent young man, grave beyond his years, I thought; but as our eyes happened to meet I detected a slight quiver on his lips. I looked down at once. It was not my part to encourage sneering on board my ship. It must be said, too, that I knew very little of my officers. In consequence of certain events of no particular significance, except to myself, I had been appointed to the command only a fortnight before. Neither did I know much of the hands forward. All these people had been together for eighteen months or so, and my position was that of the only stranger on board. I mention this because it has some bearing on what is to follow. But what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself. The youngest man on board (barring the second mate), and untried as yet by a position of the

fullest responsibility, I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks; but I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly.

Meantime the chief mate, with an almost visible effect of collaboration on the part of his round eyes and frightful whiskers, was trying to evolve a theory of the anchored ship. His dominant trait was to take all things into earnest consideration. He was of a painstaking turn of mind. As he used to say, he 'liked to account to himself' for practically everything that came in his way, down to a miserable scorpion he had found in his cabin a week before. The why and the wherefore of that scorpion—how it got on board and came to select his room rather than the pantry (which was a dark place and more what a scorpion would be partial to) and how on earth it managed to drown itself in the ink-well of his writing-desk—had exercised him infinitely. The ship within the islands was much more easily accounted for; and just as we were about to rise from table he made his pronouncement. She was, he doubted not, a ship from home lately arrived. Probably she drew too much water to cross the bar except at the top of spring-tides. Therefore she went into that natural harbour to wait for a few days in preference to remaining in an open roadstead.

'That's so,' confirmed the second mate suddenly, in his slightly hoarse voice. 'She draws over twenty feet. She's the Liverpool ship Sephora with a cargo of coal. Hundred and twenty-three days from

Cardiff.'

We looked at him in surprise.

'The tugboat skipper told me when he came on board for your letters, sir,' explained the young man. 'He expects to take her up the river the day after tomorrow.'

After thus overwhelming us with the extent of his information he slipped out of the cabin. The mate observed regretfully that he 'could not account for that young fellow's whims'. What prevented him telling us all about it at once, he wanted to know.

I detained him as he was making a move. For the last two days the crew had had plenty of hard work, and the night before they had very little sleep. I felt painfully that I—a stranger—was doing something unusual when I directed him to let all hands turn in without setting an

anchor-watch. I proposed to keep on deck myself till one o'clock or thereabouts. I would get the second mate to relieve me at that hour.

'He will turn out the cook and the steward at four,' I concluded, 'and then give you a call. Of course at the slightest sign of any sort of wind we'll have the hands up and make a start at once.'

He concealed his astonishment. 'Very well, sir.' Outside the cuddy he put his head in the second mate's door to inform him of my unheard-of caprice to take a five hours' anchor-watch on myself. I heard the other raise his voice incredulously—'What? The captain himself?' Then a few more murmurs, a door closed, then another. A few moments later I went on deck.

My strangeness, which had made me sleepless, had prompted that unconventional arrangement, as if I had expected in those solitary hours of the night to get on terms with the ship of which I knew nothing, manned by men of whom I knew very little more. Fast alongside a wharf, littered like any ship in port with a tangle of unrelated things, invaded by unrelated shore people, I had hardly seen her yet properly. Now, as she lay cleared for sea, the stretch of her main deck seemed to me very fine under the stars. Very fine, very roomy for her size, and very inviting. I descended the poop and paced the waist, my mind picturing to myself the coming passage through the Malay Archipelago, down the Indian Ocean, and up the Atlantic. All its phases were familiar enough to me, every characteristic, all the alternatives which were likely to face me on the high seas-everything! . . . except the novel responsibility of command. But I took heart from the reasonable thought that the ship was like other ships, the men like other men, and that the sea was not likely to keep any special surprises expressly for my discomfiture.

Arrived at that comforting conclusion, I bethought myself of a cigar and went below to get it. All was still down there. Everybody at the after-end of the ship was sleeping profoundly. I came out again on the quarterdeck, agreeably at ease in my sleeping-suit on that warm, breathless night, barefooted, a glowing cigar in my teeth, and, going forward, I was met by the profound silence of the fore-end of the ship. Only as I passed the door of the forecastle I heard a deep, quiet, trustful sigh of some sleeper inside. And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an

elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose.

The riding-light in the fore-rigging burned with a clear, untroubled, as if symbolic, flame, confident and bright in the mysterious shades of the night. Passing on my way aft along the other side of the ship, I observed that the rope side-ladder, put over, no doubt, for the master of the tug when he came to fetch away our letters, had not been hauled in as it should have been. I became annoyed at this, for exactitude in small matters is the very soul of discipline. Then I reflected that I had myself peremptorily dismissed my officers from duty, and by my own act had prevented the anchor-watch being formally set and things properly attended to. I asked myself whether it was wise ever to interfere with the established routine of duties even from the kindest of motives. My action might have made me appear eccentric. Goodness only knew how that absurdly whiskered mate would 'account' for my conduct, and what the whole ship thought of that informality of their new captain. I was vexed with myself.

Not from compunction certainly, but, as it were mechanically, I proceeded to get the ladder in myself. Now a side-ladder of that sort is a light affair and comes in easily, yet my vigorous tug, which should have brought it flying on board, merely recoiled upon my body in a totally unexpected jerk. What the devil! . . . I was so astounded by the immovableness of that ladder that I remained stock-still, trying to account for it to myself like that imbecile mate of mine. In the end, of course, I put my head over the rail.

The side of the ship made an opaque belt of shadow on the darkling glassy shimmer of the sea. But I saw at once something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder. Before I could form a guess, a faint flash of phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue suddenly from the naked body of a man, flickered in the sleeping water with the elusive, silent play of summer lightning in a night sky. With a gasp I saw revealed to my stare a pair of feet, the long legs, a broad livid back immersed right up to the neck in a greenish cadaverous glow. One hand, awash, clutched the bottom rung of the ladder. He was complete but for the head. A headless corpse! The cigar dropped out of my gaping mouth with a tiny plop and a short hiss quite audible in the absolute stillness of all things under heaven. At that I suppose he raised up his face, a dimly pale oval in the shadow of the ship's side. But even then I

could only barely make out down there the shape of his black-haired head. However, it was enough for the horrid, frost-bound sensation which had gripped me about the chest to pass off. The moment of vain exclamations was past too. I only climbed on the spare spar and leaned over the rail as far as I could, to bring my eyes nearer to that mystery floating alongside.

As he hung by the ladder, like a resting swimmer, the sea-lightning played about his limbs at every stir; and he appeared in it ghastly, silvery, fish-like. He remained as mute as a fish, too. He made no motion to get out of the water, either. It was inconceivable that he should not attempt to come on board, and strangely troubling to suspect that perhaps he did not want to. And my first words were prompted by just that troubled incertitude.

'What's the matter?' I asked in my ordinary tone, speaking down to the face upturned exactly under mine.

'Cramp,' it answered, no louder. Then slightly anxious, 'I say, no need to call anyone.'

'I was not going to,' I said.

'Are you alone on deck?'

'Yes.'

I had somehow the impression that he was on the point of letting go the ladder to swim away beyond my ken—mysterious as he came. But, for the moment, this being appearing as if he had risen from the bottom of the sea (it was certainly the nearest land to the ship) wanted only to know the time. I told him. And he, down there, tentatively:

'I suppose your captain's turned in?'

'I am sure he isn't,' I said.

He seemed to struggle with himself, for I heard something like the low, bitter murmur of doubt. 'What's the good?' His next words came out with a hesitating effort.

'Look here, my man. Could you call him out quietly?'

I thought the time had come to declare myself.

'I am the captain.'

I heard a 'By Jove!' whispered at the level of the water. The phosphorescence flashed in the swirl of the water all about his limbs, his other hand seized the ladder.

'My name's Leggatt.'

The voice was calm and resolute—a good voice. The self-possession

of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself. It was very quietly that I remarked:

'You must be a good swimmer.'

'Yes. I've been in the water practically since nine o'clock. The question for me now is whether I am to let go this ladder and go on swimming till I sink from exhaustion, or—to come on board here.'

I felt this was no mere formula of desperate speech, but a real alternative in the view of a strong soul. I should have gathered from this that he was young; indeed, it is only the young who are ever confronted by such clear issues. But at the time it was pure intuition on my part. A mysterious communication was established already between us two—in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea. I was young, too; young enough to make no comment. The man in the water began suddenly to climb up the ladder, and I hastened away from the rail to fetch some clothes.

Before entering the cabin I stood still, listening in the lobby at the foot of the stairs. A faint snore came through the closed door of the chief mate's room. The second mate's door was on the hook, but the darkness in there was absolutely soundless. He, too, was young and could sleep like a stone. Remained the steward, but he was not likely to wake up before he was called. I got a sleeping-suit out of my room, and, coming back on deck, saw the naked man from the sea sitting on the main hatch, glimmering white in the darkness, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. In a moment he had concealed his damp body in a sleeping-suit of the same grey-stripe pattern as the one I was wearing, and followed me like my double on the poop. Together we moved right aft, barefooted, silent.

'What is it?' I asked in a deadened voice, taking the lighted lamp out of the binnacle, and raising it to his face.

'An ugly business.'

He had rather regular features; a good mouth; light eyes under somewhat heavy, dark eyebrows; a smooth, square forehead; no growth on his cheeks; a small, brown moustache, and a well-shaped, round chin. His expression was concentrated, meditative, under the inspecting light of the lamp I held up to his face; such as a man thinking hard in solitude might wear. My sleeping-suit was just right for his size. A well-knit young fellow of twenty-five at most. He caught his lower lip with the edge of white, even teeth.

'Yes,' I said, replacing the lamp in the binnacle. The warm, heavy tropical night closed upon his head again.

'There's a ship over there,' he murmured.

'Yes, I know. The Sephora. Did you know of us?'

'Hadn't the slightest idea. I am the mate of her——' He paused and corrected himself. 'I should say I was.'

'Aha! Something wrong?'

'Yes. Very wrong indeed. I've killed a man.'

'What do you mean? Just now?'

'No, on the passage. Weeks ago. Thirty-nine south. When I say a man——'

'Fit of temper,' I suggested confidently.

The shadowy, dark head, like mine, seemed to nod imperceptibly above the ghostly grey of my sleeping-suit. It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror.

'A pretty thing to have to own up to for a Conway boy,' murmured my double distinctly.

'You're a Conway boy?'

'I am,' he said, as if startled. Then, slowly . . . 'Perhaps you too——'

It was so; but being a couple of years older I had left before he joined. After a quick interchange of dates a silence fell; and I thought suddenly of my absurd mate with his terrific whiskers and the 'Bless my soul—you don't say so' type of intellect. My double gave me an inkling of his thoughts by saying:

'My father's a parson in Norfolk. Do you see me before a judge and jury on that charge? For myself I can't see the necessity. There are fellows that an angel from heaven—and I am not that. He was one of those creatures that are just simmering all the time with a silly sort of wickedness. Miserable devils that have no business to live at all. He wouldn't do his duty and wouldn't let anybody else do theirs. But what's the good of talking! You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur—.'

He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. And I knew well enough the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression. And I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in

brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going

on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping-suit.

'It happened while we were setting a reefed foresail, at dusk, Reefed foresail! You understand the sort of weather. The only sail we had left to keep the ship running; so you may guess what it had been like for days. Anxious sort of job, that. He gave me some of his cursed insolence at the sheet. I tell you I was overdone with this terrific weather that seemed to have no end to it. Terrific, I tell you-and a deep ship. I believe the fellow himself was half crazed with funk. It was no time for gentlemanly reproof, so I turned round and felled him like an ox. He up and at me. We closed just as an awful sea made for the ship. All hands saw it coming and took to the rigging, but I had him by the throat, and went on shaking him like a rat, the men above us yelling, "Look out! Look out!" Then a crash as if the sky had fallen on my head. They say that for over ten minutes hardly anything was to be seen of the ship—just the three masts and a bit of the fo'c'sle head and of the poop all awash driving along in a smother of foam. It was a miracle that they found us, jammed together behind the forebits. It's clear that I meant business, because I was holding him by the throat still when they picked us up. He was black in the face. It was too much for them. It seems they rushed us aft together, gripped as we were, screaming "Murder!" like a lot of lunatics, and broke into the cuddy. And the ship running for her life, touch and go all the time, any minute her last in a sea fit to turn your hair grey only a-looking at it. I understand that the skipper, too, started raving like the rest of them. The man had been deprived of sleep for more than a week, and to have this sprung on him at the height of a furious gale nearly drove him out of his mind. I wonder they didn't fling me overboard after getting the carcass of their precious shipmate out of my fingers. They had rather a job to separate us, I've been told. A sufficiently fierce story to make an old judge and a respectable jury sit up a bit. The first thing I heard when I came to myself was the maddening howling of that endless gale, and on that the voice of the old man. He was hanging on to my bunk, staring into my face out of his sou'wester.

"Mr Leggatt, you have killed a man. You can act no longer as chief

mate of this ship."

His care to subdue his voice made it sound monotonous. He rested a hand on the end of the skylight to steady himself with, and all that time

did not stir a limb, so far as I could see. 'Nice little tale for a quiet tea-

party,' he concluded in the same tone.

One of my hands, too, rested on the end of the skylight; neither did I stir a limb, so far as I knew. We stood less than a foot from each other. It occurred to me that if old 'Bless my soul—you don't say so' were to put his head up the companion and catch sight of us, he would think he was seeing double, or imagine himself come upon a scene of weird witchcraft; the strange captain having a quiet confabulation by the wheel with his own grey ghost. I became very much concerned to prevent anything of the sort. I heard the other's soothing undertone:

'My father's a parson in Norfolk,' it said. Evidently he had forgotten

he had told me this important fact before. Truly a nice little tale.

'You had better slip down into my stateroom now,' I said, moving off stealthily. My double followed my movements; our bare feet made no sound; I let him in, closed the door with care, and, after giving a call to the second mate, returned on deck for my relief.

'Not much sign of any wind yet,' I remarked when he approached.

'No, sir. Not much,' he assented sleepily in his hoarse voice, with just enough deference, no more, and barely suppressing a yawn.

'Well, that's all you have to look out for. You have got your orders.'

'Yes, sir.'

I paced a turn or two on the poop and saw him take up his position face forward with his elbow in the ratlines of the mizzen rigging before I went below. The mate's faint snoring was still going on peacefully. The cuddy lamp was burning over the table on which stood a vase with flowers, a polite attention from the ship's provision merchant—the last flowers we should see for the next three months at the very least. Two bunches of bananas hung from the beam symmetrically, one on each side of the rudder-casing. Everything was as before in the ship—except that two of her captain's sleeping-suits were simultaneously in use, one motionless in the cuddy, the other keeping very still in the captain's stateroom.

It must be explained here that my cabin had the form of the capital letter L, the door being within the angle and opening into the short part of the letter. A couch was to the left, the bed-place to the right; my writing-desk and the chronometers' table faced the door. But anyone opening it, unless he stepped right inside, had no view of what I call the long (or vertical) part of the letter. It contained some lockers sur-





mounted by a bookcase; and a few clothes, a thick jacket or two, caps, oilskin coat, and suchlike, hung on hooks. There was at the bottom of that part a door opening into my bathroom, which could be entered also directly from the saloon. But that way was never used.

The mysterious arrival had discovered the advantage of this particular shape. Entering my room, lighted strongly by a big bulkhead lamp swung on gimbals above my writing-desk, I did not see him anywhere till he stepped out quietly from behind the coats hung in the recessed part.

'I heard somebody moving about, and went in there at once,' he whispered.

I, too, spoke under my breath.

'Nobody is likely to come in here without knocking and getting permission.'

He nodded. His face was thin and the sunburn faded, as though he had been ill. And no wonder. He had been, I heard presently, kept under arrest in his cabin for nearly seven weeks. But there was nothing sickly in his eyes or in his expression. He was not a bit like me, really; yet, as we stood leaning over my bed-place, whispering side by side, with our dark heads together and our backs to the door, anybody bold enough to open it stealthily would have been treated to the uncanny sight of a double captain busy talking in whispers with his other self.

'But all this doesn't tell me how you came to hang on to our side-ladder,' I enquired, in the hardly audible murmurs we used, after he had told me something more of the proceedings on board the *Sephora* once the bad weather was over.

'When we sighted Java Head I had had time to think all those matters out several times over. I had six weeks of doing nothing else, and with only an hour or so every evening for a tramp on the quarterdeck.'

He whispered, his arms folded on the side of my bed-place, staring through the open port. And I could imagine perfectly the manner of this thinking out—a stubborn if not a steadfast operation; something of which I should have been perfectly incapable.

'I reckoned it would be dark before we closed with the land,' he continued, so low that I had to strain my hearing, near as we were to each other, shoulder touching shoulder almost. 'So I asked to speak to the old man. He always seemed very sick when he came to see me—as if he could not look me in the face. You know, that foresail saved the ship.

She was too deep to have run long under bare poles. And it was I that managed to set it for him. Anyway, he came. When I had him in my cabin—he stood by the door looking at me as if I had the halter round my neck already—I asked him right away to leave my cabin door unlocked at night while the ship was going through Sunda Straits. There would be the Java coast within two or three miles, off Angier Point. I wanted nothing more. I've had a prize for swimming my second year in the Conway.'

'I can believe it,' I breathed out.

'God only knows why they locked me in every night. To see some of their faces you'd have thought they were afraid I'd go about at night strangling people. Am I a murdering brute? Do I look it? By Jove! if I had been he wouldn't have trusted himself like that into my room. You'll say I might have chucked him aside and bolted out, there and then—it was dark already. Well, no. And for the same reason I wouldn't think of trying to smash the door. There would have been a rush to stop me at the noise, and I did not mean to get into a confounded scrimmage. Somebody else might have got killed-for I would not have broken out only to get chucked back, and I did not want any more of that work. He refused, looking more sick than ever. He was afraid of the men, and also of that old second mate of his who had been sailing with him for years—a grey-headed old humbug; and his steward, too, had been with him devil knows how long—seventeen years or more—a dogmatic sort of loafer who hated me like poison, just because I was the chief mate. No chief mate ever made more than one voyage in the Sephora, you know. Those two old chaps ran the ship. Devil only knows what the skipper wasn't afraid of (all his nerve went to pieces altogether in that hellish spell of bad weather we had)—of what the law would do to him—of his wife, perhaps. Oh yes! she's on board. Though I don't think she would have meddled. She would have been only too glad to have me out of the ship in any way. The "brand of Cain" business, don't you see? That's all right. I was ready enough to go off wandering on the face of the earth—and that was price enough to pay for an Abel of that sort. Anyhow, he wouldn't listen to me. "This thing must take its course. I represent the law here." He was shaking like a leaf. "So you won't?" "No!" "Then I hope you will be able to sleep on that," I said, and turned my back on him. "I wonder that you can," cries he, and locks the door.

'Well, after that, I couldn't. Not very well. That was three weeks ago. We have had a slow passage through the Java Sea; drifted about Carimata for ten days. When we anchored here they thought, I suppose, it was all right. The nearest land (and that's five miles) is the ship's destination; the Consul would soon set about catching me; and there would have been no object in bolting to these islets there. I don't suppose there's a drop of water on them. I don't know how it was, but tonight that steward, after bringing me my supper, went out to let me eat it, and left the door unlocked. And I ate it—all there was, too. After I had finished I strolled out on the quarterdeck. I don't know that I meant to do anything. A breath of fresh air was all I wanted, I believe. Then a sudden temptation came over me. I kicked off my slippers and was in the water before I had made up my mind fairly. Somebody heard the splash and they raised an awful hullabaloo. "He's gone! Lower the boats! He's committed suicide! No, he's swimming." Certainly I was swimming. It's not so easy for a swimmer like me to commit suicide by drowning. I landed on the nearest islet before the boat left the ship's side. I heard them pulling about in the dark, hailing, and so on, but after a bit they gave up. Everything quieted down and the anchorage became as still as death. I sat down on a stone and began to think. I felt certain they would start searching for me at daylight. There was no place to hide on those stony things—and if there had been, what would have been the good? But now I was clear of that ship, I was not going back. So after a while I took off all my clothes, tied them up in a bundle with a stone inside, and dropped them in the deep water on the outer side of that islet. That was suicide enough for me. Let them think what they liked, but I didn't mean to drown myself. I meant to swim till I sank—but that's not the same thing. I struck out for another of these little islands, and it was from that one that I first saw your riding-light. Something to swim for. I went on easily, and on the way I came upon a flat rock a foot or two above water. In the daytime, I daresay, you might make it out with a glass from your poop. I scrambled up on it and rested myself for a bit. Then I made another start. That last spell must have been over a mile.'

His whisper was getting fainter and fainter, and all the time he stared straight out through the port-hole, in which there was not even a star to be seen. I had not interrupted him. There was something that made comment impossible in his narrative, or perhaps in himself; a sort of

feeling, a quality, which I can't find a name for. And when he ceased, all

I found was a futile whisper, 'So you swam for our light?'

'Yes—straight for it. It was something to swim for. I couldn't see any stars low down because the coast was in the way, and I couldn't see the land, either. The water was like glass. One might have been swimming in a confounded thousand-feet-deep cistern with no place for scrambling out anywhere; but what I didn't like was the notion of swimming round and round like a crazed bullock before I gave out; and as I didn't mean to go back . . . No. Do you see me being hauled back, stark naked, off one of these little islands by the scruff of the neck and fighting like a wild beast? Somebody would have got killed for certain, and I did not want any of that. So I went on. Then your ladder——'

'Why didn't you hail the ship?' I asked, a little louder.

He touched my shoulder lightly. Lazy footsteps came right over our heads and stopped. The second mate had crossed from the other side of the poop and might have been hanging over the rail, for all we knew.

'He couldn't hear us talking-could he?' My double breathed into

my very ear anxiously.

His anxiety was an answer, a sufficient answer, to the question I had put to him. An answer containing all the difficulty of that situation. I closed the port-hole quietly, to make sure. A louder word might have been overheard.

'Who's that?' he whispered then.

'My second mate. But I don't know much more of the fellow than you do.'

And I told him a little about myself. I had been appointed to take charge while I least expected anything of the sort, not quite a fortnight ago. I didn't know either the ship or the people. Hadn't had the time in port to look about me or size anybody up. And as to the crew, all they knew was that I was appointed to take the ship home. For the rest, I was almost as much of a stranger on board as himself, I said. And at the moment I felt it most acutely. I felt that it would take very little to make me a suspect person in the eyes of the ship's company.

He had turned about meantime; and we, the two strangers in the

ship, faced each other in identical attitudes.

'Your ladder——' he murmured, after a silence. 'Who'd have thought of finding a ladder hanging over at night in a ship anchored out here! I felt just then a very unpleasant faintness. After the life I've been

leading for nine weeks, anybody would have got out of condition. I wasn't capable of swimming round as far as your rudder-chains. And, lo and behold! there was a ladder to get hold of. After I gripped it I said to myself, "What's the good?" When I saw a man's head looking over I thought I would swim away presently and leave him shouting—in whatever language it was. I didn't mind being looked at. I—I liked it. And then you speaking to me so quietly—as if you had expected me—made me hold on a little longer. It had been a confounded lonely time—I don't mean while swimming. I was glad to talk a little to somebody that didn't belong to the Sephora. As to asking for the captain, that was a mere impulse. It could have been no use, with all the ship knowing about me and the other people pretty certain to be round here in the morning. I don't know—I wanted to be seen, to talk with somebody, before I went on. I don't know what I would have said . . . "Fine night, isn't it?" or something of the sort.'

'Do you think they will be round here presently?' I asked, with some incredulity.

'Quite likely,' he said faintly.

He looked extremely haggard all of a sudden. His head rolled on his shoulders.

'H'm. We shall see then. Meantime get into that bed,' I whispered. 'Want help? There.'

It was a rather high bed-place with a set of drawers underneath. This amazing swimmer really needed the lift I gave him by seizing his leg. He tumbled in, rolled over on his back, and flung one arm across his eyes. And then, with his face nearly hidden, he must have looked exactly as I used to look in that bed. I gazed upon my other self for a while before drawing across carefully the two green serge curtains which ran on a brass rod. I thought for a moment of pinning them together for greater safety, but I sat down on the couch, and once there I felt unwilling to rise and hunt for a pin. I would do it in a moment. I was extremely tired, in a peculiarly intimate way, by the strain of stealthiness, by the effort of whispering, and the general secrecy of this excitement. It was three o'clock by now, and I had been on my feet since nine, but I was not sleepy; I could not have gone to sleep. I sat there, fagged out, looking at the curtains, trying to clear my mind of the confused sensation of being in two places at once, and greatly bothered by an exasperating knocking in my head. It was a relief to discover suddenly that it was not in my

head at all, but on the outside of the door. Before I could collect myself, the words 'Come in' were out of my mouth, and the steward entered with a tray, bringing in my morning coffee. I had slept, after all, and I was so frightened that I shouted, 'This way! I am here, Steward,' as though he had been miles away. He put down the tray on the table next the couch and only then said, very quietly, 'I can see you are here, sir.' I felt him give me a keen look, but I dared not meet his eyes just then. He must have wondered why I had drawn the curtains of my bed before going to sleep on the couch. He went out, hooking the door open as usual.

I heard the crew washing decks above me. I knew I would have been told at once if there had been any wind. Calm, I thought, and I was doubly vexed. Indeed, I felt dual more than ever. The steward reappeared suddenly in the doorway. I jumped up from the couch so quickly that he gave a start.

'What do you want here?'

'Close your port, sir—they are washing decks.'

'It is closed,' I said, reddening.

'Very well, sir.' But he did not move from the doorway, and returned my stare in an extraordinary, equivocal manner for a time. Then his eyes wavered, all his expression changed, and in a voice unusually gentle, almost coaxingly:

'May I come in to take the empty cup away, sir?'

'Of course!' I turned my back on him while he popped in and out. Then I unhooked and closed the door and even pushed the bolt. This sort of thing could not go on very long. The cabin was as hot as an oven, too. I took a peep at my double, and discovered that he had not moved, his arm was still over his eyes; but his chest heaved; his hair was wet; his chin glistened with perspiration. I reached over him and opened the port.

'I must show myself on deck,' I reflected.

Of course, theoretically, I could do what I liked, with no one to say nay to me within the whole circle of the horizon; but to lock my cabin door and take the key away I did not dare. Directly I put my head out of the companion I saw the group of my two officers, the second mate barefooted, the chief mate in long india-rubber boots, near the break of the poop, and the steward half-way down the poop ladder talking to them eagerly. He happened to catch sight of me and dived, the second

ran down on the main deck shouting some order or other, and the chief mate came to meet me, touching his cap.

There was a sort of curiosity in his eye that I did not like. I don't know whether the steward had told them that I was 'queer' only, or downright drunk, but I know the man meant to have a good look at me. I watched him coming with a smile which, as he got into point-blank range, took effect and froze his very whiskers. I did not give him time to open his lips.

'Square the yards by lifts and braces before the hands go to breakfast.'

It was the first particular order I had given on board that ship; and I stayed on deck to see it executed too. I had felt the need of asserting myself without loss of time. That sneering young cub got taken down a peg or two on that occasion, and I also seized the opportunity of having a good look at the face of every foremast man as they filed past me to go to the after-braces. At breakfast-time, eating nothing myself, I presided with such frigid dignity that the two mates were only too glad to escape from the cabin as soon as decency permitted; and all the time the dual working of my mind distracted me almost to the point of insanity. I was constantly watching myself, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality, sleeping in that bed, behind that door which faced me as I sat at the head of the table. It was very much like being mad, only it was worse, because one was aware of it.

I had to shake him for a solid minute, but when at last he opened his eyes it was in the full possession of his senses, with an enquiring look.

'All's well so far,' I whispered. 'Now you must vanish into the bath-room.'

He did so, as noiseless as a ghost, and I then rang for the steward, and facing him boldly, directed him to tidy up my stateroom while I was having my bath—'and be quick about it'. As my tone admitted of no excuses, he said, 'Yes, sir,' and ran off to fetch his dustpan and brushes. I took a bath and did most of my dressing, splashing, and whistling softly for the steward's edification, while the secret sharer of my life stood drawn bolt upright in that little space, his face looking very sunken in daylight, his eyelids lowered under the stern, dark line of his eyebrows drawn together by a slight frown.

When I left him there to go back to my room the steward was finishing dusting. I sent for the mate and engaged him in some insignificant

conversation. It was, as it were, trifling with the terrific character of his whiskers; but my object was to give him an opportunity for a good look at my cabin. And then I could at last shut, with a clear conscience, the door of my stateroom and get my double back into the recessed part. There was nothing else for it. He had to sit still on a small folding stool, half smothered by the heavy coats hanging there. We listened to the steward going into the bathroom out of the saloon, filling the waterbottles there, scrubbing the bath, setting things to rights, whisk, bang, clatter—out again into the saloon—turn the key—click. Such was my scheme for keeping my second self invisible. Nothing better could be contrived under the circumstances. And there we sat: I at my writingdesk ready to appear busy with some papers, he behind me, out of sight of the door. It would not have been prudent to talk in daytime; and I could not have stood the excitement of that queer sense of whispering to myself. Now and then, glancing over my shoulder, I saw him far back there, sitting rigidly on the low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, his head hanging on his breast—and perfectly still. Anybody would have taken him for me.

I was fascinated by it myself. Every moment I had to glance over my shoulder. I was looking at him when a voice outside the door said:

'Beg pardon, sir.'

'Well!' . . . I kept my eyes on him, and so, when the voice outside the door announced, 'There's a ship's boat coming our way, sir,' I saw him give a start—the first movement he had made for hours. But he did not raise his bowed head.

'All right. Get the ladder over.'

I hesitated. Should I whisper something to him? But what? His immobility seemed to have been never disturbed. What could I tell him he did not know already? . . . Finally I went on deck.



The skipper of the Sephora had a thin, red whisker all round his face, and the sort of complexion that goes with hair of that colour; also the particular, rather smeary shade of blue in the eyes. He was not exactly a showy figure; his shoulders were high, his stature but middling—one leg slightly more bandy than the other. He shook hands, looking vaguely

around. A spiritless tenacity was his main characteristic, I judged. I behaved with a politeness which seemed to disconcert him. Perhaps he was shy. He mumbled to me as if he were ashamed of what he was saying; gave his name (it was something like Archbold—but at this distance of years I hardly am sure), his ship's name, and a few other particulars of that sort, in the manner of a criminal making a reluctant and doleful confession. He had had terrible weather on the passage out—terrible—terrible—wife aboard, too.

By this time we were seated in the cabin and the steward brought in a tray with a bottle and glasses. 'Thanks! No.' Never took liquor. Would have some water, though. He drank two tumblerfuls. Terrible thirsty work. Ever since daylight had been exploring the islands round his ship.

'What was that for-fun?' I asked, with an appearance of polite

interest.

'No!' He sighed. 'Painful duty.'

As he persisted in his mumbling, and I wanted my double to hear every word, I hit upon the notion of informing him that I regretted to say I was hard of hearing.

'Such a young man, too!' he nodded, keeping his smeary blue, unintelligent eyes fastened upon me. What was the cause of it—some disease? he enquired, without the least sympathy and as if he thought that, if so, I'd got no more than I deserved.

'Yes; disease,' I admitted in a cheerful tone which seemed to shock him. But my point was gained, because he had to raise his voice to give me his tale. It is not worth while to record that version. It was just over two months since all this had happened, and he had thought so much about it that he seemed completely muddled as to its bearings, but still immensely impressed.

'What would you think of such a thing happening on board your own ship? I've had the Sephora for these fifteen years. I am a well-known

shipmaster.'

He was densely distressed—and perhaps I should have sympathised with him if I had been able to detach my mental vision from the unsuspected sharer of my cabin as though he were my second self. There he was on the other side of the bulkhead, four or five feet from us, no more, as we sat in the saloon. I looked politely at Captain Archbold (if that was his name), but it was the other I saw, in a grey sleeping-suit, seated on a low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, and

every word said between us falling into the ears of his dark head bowed on his chest.

'I have been at sea now, man and boy, for seven-and-thirty years, and I've never heard of such a thing happening in an English ship. And that it should be my ship. Wife on board, too.'

I was hardly listening to him.

'Don't you think', I said, 'that the heavy sea which, you told me, came aboard just then might have killed the man? I have seen the sheer weight of a sea kill a man very neatly, by simply breaking his neck.'

'Good God!' he uttered impressively, fixing his smeary blue eyes on me. 'The sea! No man killed by the sea ever looked like that.' He seemed positively scandalised at my suggestion. And as I gazed at him, certainly not prepared for anything original on his part, he advanced his head close to mine and thrust his tongue out at me so suddenly that I couldn't help starting back.

After scoring over my calmness in this graphic way he nodded wisely. If I had seen the sight, he assured me, I would never forget it as long as I lived. The weather was too bad to give the corpse a proper sea burial. So next day at dawn they took it up on the poop, covering its face with a bit of bunting; he read a short prayer, and then, just as it was, in its oilskins and long boots, they launched it amongst those mountainous seas that seemed ready every moment to swallow up the ship herself and the terrified lives on board of her.

'That reefed foresail saved you,' I threw in.

'Under God-it did,' he exclaimed fervently. 'It was by a special mercy, I firmly believe, that it stood some of those hurricane squalls.'

'It was the setting of that sail which——' I began.

'God's own hand in it,' he interrupted me. 'Nothing less could have done it. I don't mind telling you that I hardly dared give the order. It seemed impossible that we could touch anything without losing it, and then our last hope would have been gone.'

The terror of that gale was on him yet. I let him go on for a bit, then

said casually—as if returning to a minor subject:

'You were very anxious to give up your mate to the shore people, I believe?'

He was. To the law. His obscure tenacity on that point had in it something incomprehensible and a little awful; something, as it were, mystical, quite apart from his anxiety that he should not be suspected

of 'countenancing any doings of that sort'. Seven-and-thirty virtuous years at sea, of which over twenty of immaculate command, and the last fifteen in the *Sephora*, seemed to have laid him under some pitiless obligation.

'And you know,' he went on, groping shamefacedly amongst his feelings, 'I did not engage that young fellow. His people had some interest with my owners. I was in a way forced to take him on. He looked very smart, very gentlemanly, and all that. But do you know—I never liked him, somehow. I am a plain man. You see, he wasn't exactly the sort for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*.'

I had become so connected in thoughts and impressions with the secret sharer of my cabin that I felt as if I, personally, were being given to understand that I, too, was not the sort that would have done for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*. I had no doubt of it in my mind.

'Not at all the style of man. You understand,' he insisted superfluously, looking hard at me.

I smiled urbanely. He seemed at a loss for a while.

'I suppose I must report a suicide.'

'Beg pardon?'

'Sui—cide! That's what I'll have to write to my owners directly I get in.'

'Unless you manage to recover him before tomorrow,' I assented dispassionately . . . 'I mean, alive.'

He mumbled something which I really did not catch, and I turned my ear to him in a puzzled manner. He fairly bawled:

'The land—I say, the mainland is at least seven miles off my anchorage.'

'About that.'

My lack of excitement, of curiosity, of surprise, of any sort of pronounced interest, began to arouse his distrust. But except for the felicitous pretence of deafness I had not tried to pretend anything. I had felt utterly incapable of playing the part of ignorance properly, and therefore was afraid to try. It is also certain that he had brought some ready-made suspicions with him, and that he viewed my politeness as a strange and unnatural phenomenon. And yet how else could I have received him? Not heartily! That was impossible for psychological reasons, which I need not state here. My only object was to keep off his enquiries. Surlily? Yes, but surliness might have provoked a point-blank

question. From its novelty to him and from its nature, punctilious courtesy was the manner best calculated to restrain the man. But there was the danger of his breaking through my defence bluntly. I could not, I think, have met him by a direct lie, also for psychological (not moral) reasons. If he had only known how afraid I was of his putting my feeling of identity with the other to the test! But, strangely enough (I thought of it only afterward), I believe that he was not a little disconcerted by the reverse side of that weird situation, by something in me that reminded him of the man he was seeking—suggested a mysterious similitude to the young fellow he had distrusted and disliked from the first.

However that might have been, the silence was not very prolonged. He took another oblique step.

'I reckon I had no more than a two-mile pull to your ship. Not a bit more.'

'And quite enough, too, in this awful heat,' I said.

Another pause full of mistrust followed. Necessity, they say, is mother of invention, but fear, too, is not barren of ingenious suggestions. And I was afraid he would ask me point-blank for news of my other self.

'Nice little saloon, isn't it?' I remarked, as if noticing for the first time the way his eyes roamed from one closed door to the other. 'And very well fitted out, too. Here, for instance,' I continued, reaching over the back of my seat negligently and flinging the door open, 'is my bathroom.'

He made an eager movement, but hardly gave it a glance. I got up, shut the door of the bathroom, and invited him to have a look round, as if I were very proud of my accommodation. He had to rise and be shown round, but he went through the business without any raptures whatever.

'And now we'll have a look at my stateroom,' I declared, in a voice as loud as I dared to make it, crossing the cabin to the starboard side with purposely heavy steps.

He followed me in and gazed around. My intelligent double had vanished. I played my part.

'Very convenient—isn't it?'

'Very nice. Very comf . . .' He didn't finish, and went out brusquely as if to escape from some unrighteous wiles of mine. But it was not to

be. I had been too frightened not to feel vengeful; I felt I had him on the run, and I meant to keep him on the run. My polite insistence must have had something menacing in it, because he gave in suddenly. And I did not let him off a single item: mate's room, pantry, storerooms, the very sail-locker, which was also under the poop—he had to look into them all. When at last I showed him out on the quarterdeck he drew a long, spiritless sigh, and mumbled dismally that he must really be going back to his ship now. I desired my mate, who had joined us, to see to the captain's boat.

The man of whiskers gave a blast on the whistle which he used to wear hanging round his neck, and yelled, 'Sephora's away!' My double down there in my cabin must have heard, and certainly could not feel more relieved than I. Four fellows came running out from somewhere forward and went over the side, while my own men, appearing on deck too, lined the rail. I escorted my visitor to the gangway ceremoniously, and nearly overdid it. He was a tenacious beast. On the very ladder he lingered, and in that unique, guiltily conscientious manner of sticking to the point:

'I say . . . you . . . you don't think that——'

I covered his voice loudly:

'Certainly not . . . I am delighted. Goodbye.'

I had an idea of what he meant to say, and just saved myself by the privilege of defective hearing. He was too shaken generally to insist, but my mate, close witness of that parting, looked mystified, and his face took on a thoughtful cast. As I did not want to appear as if I wished to avoid all communication with my officers, he had the opportunity to address me.

'Seems a very nice man. His boat's crew told our chaps a very extraordinary story, if what I am told by the steward is true. I suppose you had it from the captain, sir?'

'Yes. I had a story from the captain.'

'A very horrible affair—isn't it, sir?'

'It is.'

'Beats all these tales we hear about murders in Yankee ships.'

'I don't think it beats them. I don't think it resembles them in the least.'

'Bless my soul—you don't say so! But of course I've no acquaintance whatever with American ships, not I, so I couldn't go against

your knowledge. It's horrible enough for me... But the queerest part is that those fellows seemed to have some idea the man was hidden aboard here. They had really. Did you ever hear of such a thing?'

'Preposterous-isn't it?'

We were walking to and fro athwart the quarterdeck. No one of the crew forward could be seen (the day was Sunday), and the mate pursued:

'There was some little dispute about it. Our chaps took offence. "As if we would harbour a thing like that," they said. "Wouldn't you like to look for him in our coal-hole?" Quite a tiff. But they made it up in the end. I suppose he did drown himself. Don't you, sir?'

'I don't suppose anything.'

'You have no doubt in the matter, sir?'

'None whatever.'

I left him suddenly. I felt I was producing a bad impression, but with my double down there it was most trying to be on deck. And it was almost as trying to be below. Altogether a nerve-trying situation. But on the whole I felt less torn in two when I was with him. There was no one in the whole ship whom I dared take into my confidence. Since the hands had got to know his story, it would have been impossible to pass him off for anyone else, and an accidental discovery was to be dreaded now more than ever . . .

The steward being engaged in laying the table for dinner, we could talk only with our eyes when I first went down. Later in the afternoon we had a cautious try at whispering. The Sunday quietness of the ship was against us; the stillness of air and water around her was against us; the elements, the men were against us—everything was against us in our secret partnership; time itself—for this could not go on for ever. The very trust in Providence was, I suppose, denied to his guilt. Shall I confess that this thought cast me down very much? And as to the chapter of accidents which counts for so much in the book of success, I could only hope that it was closed. For what favourable accident could be expected?

'Did you hear everything?' were my first words as soon as we took up our position side by side, leaning over my bed-place.

He had. And the proof of it was his earnest whisper, 'The man told you he hardly dared to give the order.'

I understood the reference to be to that saving foresail.

'Yes. He was afraid of it being lost in the setting.'

'I assure you he never gave the order. He may think he did, but he never gave it. He stood there with me on the break of the poop after the main-topsail blew away, and whimpered about our last hope—positively whimpered about it and nothing else—and the night coming on! To hear one's skipper go on like that in such weather was enough to drive any fellow out of his mind. It worked me up into a sort of desperation. I just took it into my own hands and went away from him, boiling, and—But what's the use telling you? You know! . . . Do you think that if I had not been pretty fierce with them I should have got the men to do anything? Not it! The boss'en perhaps? Perhaps! It wasn't a heavy sea—it was a sea gone mad! I suppose the end of the world will be something like that; and a man may have the heart to see it coming once and be done with it—but to have to face it day after day—I don't blame anybody. I was precious little better than the rest. Only—I was an officer of that old coal-wagon, anyhow—'

'I quite understand,' I conveyed that sincere assurance into his ear. He was out of breath with whispering; I could hear him pant slightly. It was all very simple. The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy mutinous existence.

But I had no leisure to weigh the merits of the matter—footsteps in the saloon, a heavy knock. 'There's enough wind to get under way with, sir.' Here was the call of a new claim upon my thoughts and even upon my feelings.

'Turn the hands up,' I cried through the door. 'I'll be on deck

directly.'

I was going out to make the acquaintance of my ship. Before I left the cabin our eyes met—the eyes of the only two strangers on board. I pointed to the recessed part where the little camp-stool awaited him, and laid my finger on my lips. He made a gesture—somewhat vague—a little mysterious, accompanied by a faint smile, as if of regret.

This is not the place to enlarge upon the sensations of a man who feels for the first time a ship move under his feet to his own independent word. In my case they were not unalloyed. I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. Or, rather, I was not completely and wholly with her. Part of me was absent. That mental feeling of being in two places at once affected me physically as if

the mood of secrecy had penetrated my very soul. Before an hour had elapsed since the ship had begun to move, having occasion to ask the mate (he stood by my side) to take a compass bearing of the Pagoda, I caught myself reaching up to his ear in whispers. I say I caught myself, but enough had escaped to startle the man. I can't describe it otherwise than by saying that he shied. A grave, preoccupied manner, as though he were in possession of some perplexing intelligence, did not leave him henceforth. A little later I moved away from the rail to look at the compass with such a stealthy gait that the helmsman noticed it and I could not help noticing the unusual roundness of his eyes. These are trifling instances, though it's to no commander's advantage to be suspected of ludicrous eccentricities. But I was also more seriously affected. There are to a seaman certain words, gestures, that should in given conditions come as naturally, as instinctively, as the winking of a menaced eye. A certain order should spring on to his lips without thinking; a certain sign should get itself made, so to speak, without reflection. But all unconscious alertness had abandoned me. I had to make an effort of will to recall myself back (from the cabin) to the conditions of the moment. I felt that I was appearing an irresolute commander to those people who were watching me more or less critically.

And, besides, there were the scares. On the second day out, for instance, coming off the deck in the afternoon (I had straw slippers on my bare feet) I stopped at the open pantry door and spoke to the steward. He was doing something there with his back to me. At the sound of my voice he nearly jumped out of his skin, as the saying is, and inci-

dentally broke a cup.

'What on earth's the matter with you?' I asked, astonished.

He was extremely confused. 'Beg your pardon, sir. I made sure you were in your cabin.'

'You see I wasn't.'

'No, sir. I could have sworn I had heard you moving in there not a

moment ago. It's most extraordinary . . . very sorry, sir.'

I passed on with an inward shudder. I was so identified with my secret double that I did not even mention the fact in those scanty, fearful whispers we exchanged. I suppose he had made some slight noise of some kind or other. It would have been miraculous if he hadn't at one time or another. And yet, haggard as he appeared, he looked always perfectly self-controlled, more than calm—almost invulnerable. On

my suggestion he remained almost entirely in the bathroom, which, upon the whole, was the safest place. There could be really no shadow of an excuse for anyone ever wanting to go in there, once the steward had done with it. It was a very tiny place. Sometimes he reclined on the floor, his legs bent, his head sustained on one elbow. At others I would find him on the camp-stool, sitting in his grey sleeping-suit and with his cropped dark hair like a patient, unmoved convict. At night I would smuggle him into my bed-place, and we would whisper together, with the regular footfalls of the officer of the watch passing and repassing over our heads. It was an infinitely miserable time. It was lucky that some tins of fine preserves were stowed in a locker in my stateroom; hard bread I could always get hold of; and so he lived on stewed chicken, pâté de foie gras, asparagus, cooked oysters, sardines—on all sorts of abominable sham delicacies out of tins. My early-morning coffee he always drank; and it was all I dared do for him in that respect.

Every day there was the horrible manoeuvring to go through so that my room and then the bathroom should be done in the usual way. I came to hate the sight of the steward, to abhor the voice of that harmless man. I felt that it was he who would bring on the disaster of discovery. It hung like a sword over our heads.

The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam, tack for tack, in light winds and smooth water)—the fourth day, I say, of this miserable juggling with the unavoidable, as we sat at our evening meal, that man, whose slightest movement I dreaded, after putting down the dishes ran up on deck busily. This could not be dangerous. Presently he came down again; and then it appeared that he had remembered a coat of mine which I had thrown over a rail to dry after having been wetted in a shower which had passed over the ship in the afternoon. Sitting stolidly at the head of the table I became terrified at the sight of the garment on his arm. Of course he made for my door. There was no time to lose.

'Steward!' I thundered. My nerves were so shaken that I could not govern my voice and conceal my agitation. This was the sort of thing that made my terrifically whiskered mate tap his forehead with his forefinger. I had detected him using that gesture while talking on deck with a confidential air to the carpenter. It was too far to hear a word, but I had no doubt that this pantomime could only refer to the strange new captain.

'Yes, sir,' the pale-faced steward turned resignedly to me. It was this maddening course of being shouted at, checked without rhyme or reason, arbitrarily chased out of my cabin, suddenly called into it, sent flying out of his pantry on incomprehensible errands, that accounted for the growing wretchedness of his expression.

'Where are you going with that coat?'

'To your room, sir.'

'Is there another shower coming?'

'I'm sure I don't know, sir. Shall I go up again and see, sir?'

'No, never mind.'

My object was attained, as of course my other self in there would have heard everything that passed. During this interlude my two officers never raised their eyes off their respective plates; but the lip of that confounded cub, the second mate, quivered visibly.

I expected the steward to hook my coat on and come out at once. He was very slow about it; but I dominated my nervousness sufficiently not to shout after him. Suddenly I became aware (it could be heard plainly enough) that the fellow for some reason or other was opening the door of the bathroom. It was the end. The place was literally not big enough to swing a cat in. My voice died in my throat, and I went stony all over. I expected to hear a yell of surprise and terror, and made a movement, but had not the strength to get on my legs. Everything remained still. Had my second self taken the poor wretch by the throat? I don't know what I would have done next moment if I had not seen the steward come out of my room, close the door, and then stand quietly by the sideboard.

'Saved,' I thought. 'But, no! Lost! Gone! He was gone!'

I laid my knife and fork down and leaned back in my chair. My head swam. After a while, when sufficiently recovered to speak in a steady voice, I instructed my mate to put the ship round at eight o'clock himself.

'I won't come on deck,' I went on. 'I think I'll turn in, and unless the wind shifts I don't want to be disturbed before midnight. I feel a bit seedy.'

'You did look middling bad a little while ago,' the chief mate remarked without showing any great concern.

They both went out, and I stared at the steward clearing the table. There was nothing to be read on that wretched man's face. But why did he avoid my eyes, I asked myself. Then I thought I should like to hear the sound of his voice.

'Steward!'

'Sir!' Startled as usual.

'Where did you hang up that coat?'

'In the bathroom, sir.' The usual anxious tone. 'It's not quite dry yet, sir.'

For some time longer I sat in the cuddy. Had my double vanished as he had come? But of his coming there was an explanation, whereas his disappearance would be inexplicable . . . I went slowly into my dark room, shut the door, lighted the lamp, and for a time dared not turn round. When at last I did I saw him standing bolt upright in the narrow recessed part. It would not be true to say I had a shock, but an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine? It was like being haunted. Motionless, with a grave face, he raised his hands slightly at me in a gesture which meant clearly, 'Heavens! what a narrow escape!' Narrow indeed. I think I had come creeping quietly as near insanity as any man who has not actually gone over the border. That gesture restrained me, so to speak.

The mate with the terrific whiskers was now putting the ship on the other tack. In the moment of profound silence which follows upon the hands going to their stations I heard on the poop his raised voice, 'Hard alee!' and the distant shout of the order repeated on the main deck. The sails, in that light breeze, made but a faint fluttering noise. It ceased. The ship was coming round slowly; I held my breath in the renewed stillness of expectation; one wouldn't have thought that there was a single living soul on her decks. A sudden brisk shout, 'Mainsail haul!' broke the spell, and in the noisy cries and rush overhead of the men running away with the main-brace we two, down in my cabin, came together in our usual position by the bed-place.

He did not wait for my question. 'I heard him fumbling here and just managed to squat myself down in the bath,' he whispered to me. 'The fellow only opened the door and put his arm in to hang the coat up. All

the same——,

'I never thought of that,' I whispered back, even more appalled than before at the closeness of the shave, and marvelling at that something unyielding in his character which was carrying him through so finely. There was no agitation in his whisper. Whoever was being driven distracted, it was not he. He was sane. And the proof of his sanity was continued when he took up the whispering again.

'It would never do for me to come to life again.'

It was something that a ghost might have said. But what he was alluding to was his old captain's reluctant admission of the theory of suicide. It would obviously serve his turn—if I had understood at all the view which seemed to govern the unalterable purpose of his action.

'You must maroon me as soon as ever you can get amongst these

islands off the Cambodje shore,' he went on.

'Maroon you! We are not living in a boy's adventure tale,' I pro-

tested. His scornful whispering took me up.

'We aren't indeed! There's nothing of a boy's tale in this. But there's nothing else for it. I want no more. You don't suppose I am afraid of what can be done to me? Prison or gallows or whatever they may please. But you don't see me coming back to explain such things to an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen, do you? What can they know whether I am guilty or not—or of what I am guilty, either? That's my affair. What does the Bible say? "Driven off the face of the earth." Very well. I am off the face of the earth now. As I came at night so I shall go.'

'Impossible!' I murmured. 'You can't.'

'Can't?... Not naked like a soul on the Day of Judgement. I shall freeze on to this sleeping-suit. The Last Day is not yet—and... you have understood thoroughly. Didn't you?'

I felt suddenly ashamed of myself. I may say truly that I understood —and my hesitation in letting that man swim away from my ship's side

had been a mere sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice.

'It can't be done now till next night,' I breathed out. 'The ship is on the offshore tack and the wind may fail us.'

'As long as I know that you understand,' he whispered. 'But of course you do. It's a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand. You seem to have been there on purpose.' And in the same whisper, as if we two whenever we talked had to say things to each other which were not fit for the world to hear, he added, 'It's very wonderful.'

We remained side by side talking in our secret way—but sometimes silent or just exchanging a whispered word or two at long intervals. And as usual he stared through the port. A breath of wind came now and

again into our faces. The ship might have been moored in dock, so gently and on an even keel she slipped through the water, that did not murmur even at our passage, shadowy and silent like a phantom sea.

At midnight I went on deck, and to my mate's great surprise put the ship round on the other tack. His terrible whiskers flitted round me in silent criticism. I certainly should not have done it if it had been only a question of getting out of that sleepy gulf as quickly as possible. I believe he told the second mate, who relieved him, that it was a great want of judgement. The other only yawned. That intolerable cub shuffled about so sleepily and lolled against the rails in such a slack, improper fashion that I came down on him sharply.

'Aren't you properly awake yet?'

'Yes, sir! I am awake.'

'Well, then, be good enough to hold yourself as if you were. And keep a lookout. If there's any current we'll be closing with some islands before daylight.'

The east side of the gulf is fringed with islands, some solitary, others in groups. On the blue background of the high coast they seem to float on silvery patches of calm water, arid and grey, or dark green and rounded like clumps of evergreen bushes, with the larger ones, a mile or two long, showing the outlines of ridges, ribs of grey rock under the dank mantle of matted leafage. Unknown to trade, to travel, almost to geography, the manner of life they harbour is an unsolved secret. There must be villages—settlements of fishermen at least—on the largest of them, and some communication with the world is probably kept up by native craft. But all that forenoon, as we headed for them, fanned along by the faintest of breezes, I saw no sign of man or canoe in the field of the telescope I kept on pointing at the scattered group.

At noon I gave no orders for a change of course, and the mate's whiskers became much concerned and seemed to be offering themselves unduly to my notice. At last I said:

'I am going to stand right in. Quite in—as far as I can take her.'

The stare of extreme surprise imparted an air of ferocity also to his eyes, and he looked truly terrific for a moment.

'We're not doing well in the middle of the gulf,' I continued casually. 'I am going to look for the land-breezes tonight.'

'I am going to look for the land-breezes tonight.'

'Bless my soul! Do you mean, sir, in the dark amongst the lot of all them islands and reefs and shoals?' 'Well, if there are any regular land-breezes at all on this coast one

must get close inshore to find them, mustn't one?'

'Bless my soul!' he exclaimed again under his breath. All that afternoon he wore a dreamy, contemplative appearance which in him was a mark of perplexity. After dinner I went into my stateroom as if I meant to take some rest. There we two bent our dark heads over a half-unrolled chart lying on my bed.

'There,' I said. 'It's got to be Koh-ring. I've been looking at it ever since sunrise. It has got two hills and a low point. It must be inhabited. And on the coast opposite there is what looks like the mouth of a biggish river—with some town, no doubt, not far up. It's the best chance

for you that I can see.'

'Anything. Koh-ring let it be.'

He looked thoughtfully at the chart as if surveying chances and distances from a lofty height—and following with his eyes his own figure wandering on the blank land of Cochin-China, and then passing off that piece of paper clean out of sight into uncharted regions. And it was as if the ship had two captains to plan her course for her. I had been so worried and restless running up and down that I had not had the patience to dress that day. I had remained in my sleeping-suit, with straw slippers and a soft floppy hat. The closeness of the heat in the gulf had been most oppressive, and the crew were used to see me wandering in that airy attire.

'She will clear the south point as she heads now,' I whispered into his ear. 'Goodness only knows when, though, but certainly after dark. I'll edge her in to half a mile, as far as I may be able to judge in the dark——'

'Be careful,' he murmured warningly—and I realised suddenly that all my future, the only future for which I was fit, would perhaps go irretrievably to pieces in any mishap to my first command.

I could not stop a moment longer in the room. I motioned him to get out of sight and made my way on to the poop. That unplayful cub had the watch. I walked up and down for a while thinking things out, then beckoned him over.

'Send a couple of hands to open the two quarterdeck ports,' I said mildly.

He actually had the impudence, or else so forgot himself in his wonder at such an incomprehensible order, as to repeat:

'Open the quarterdeck ports! What for, sir?'

'The only reason you need concern yourself about is because I tell

you to do so. Have them opened wide and fastened properly.'

He reddened and went off, but I believe made some jeering remark to the carpenter as to the sensible practice of ventilating a ship's quarterdeck. I know he popped into the mate's cabin to impart the fact to him, because the whiskers came on deck, as it were by chance, and stole glances at me from below—for signs of lunacy or drunkenness, I suppose.

A little before supper, feeling more restless than ever, I rejoined, for a moment, my second self. And to find him sitting so quietly was sur-

prising, like something against nature, inhuman. I developed my plan in a hurried whisper.

'I shall stand in as close as I dare and then put her round. I shall

presently find means to smuggle you out of here into the sail-locker, which communicates with the lobby. But there is an opening, a sort of square for hauling the sails out, which gives straight on the quarterdeck and which is never closed in fine weather, so as to give air to the sails. When the ship's way is deadened in stays and all the hands are aft at the main-braces you shall have a clear road to slip out and get overboard through the open quarterdeck port. I've had them both fastened up. Use a rope's end to lower yourself into the water so as to avoid a splash—you know. It could be heard and cause some beastly complication.'

He kept silent for a while, then whispered, 'I understand.'

'I won't be there to see you go,' I began with an effort. 'The rest . . . I

only hope I have understood too.'

'You have. From first to last'—and for the first time there seemed to be a faltering, something strained in his whisper. He caught hold of my arm, but the ringing of the supper bell made me start. He didn't,

though; he only released his grip.

After supper I didn't come below again till well past eight o'clock. The faint, steady breeze was loaded with dew; and the wet, darkened sails held all there was of propelling power in it. The night, clear and starry, sparkled darkly, and the opaque, lightless patches shifting slowly against the low stars were the drifting islets. On the port bow there was a big one more distant and shadowily imposing by the great space of sky it eclipsed.

On opening the door I had a back view of my very own self looking at a chart. He had come out of the recess and was standing near the table.

'Quite dark enough,' I whispered.

He stepped back and leaned against my bed with a level, quiet glance. I sat on the couch. We had nothing to say to each other. Over our heads the officer of the watch moved here and there. Then I heard him move quickly. I knew what that meant. He was making for the companion; and presently his voice was outside my door.

'We are drawing in pretty fast, sir. Land looks rather close.'

'Very well,' I answered. 'I am coming on deck directly.'

I waited till he was gone out of the cuddy, then rose. My double moved too. The time had come to exchange our last whispers, for neither of us was ever to hear each other's natural voice.

'Look here!' I opened a drawer and took out three sovereigns. 'Take this, anyhow. I've got six and I'd give you the lot, only I must keep a little money to buy some fruit and vegetables for the crew from native boats as we go through Sunda Straits.'

He shook his head.

'Take it,' I urged him, whispering desperately. 'No one can tell what——'

He smiled and slapped meaningly the only pocket of the sleeping-jacket. It was not safe, certainly. But I produced a large old silk handker-chief of mine, and tying the three pieces of gold in a corner, pressed it on him. He was touched, I suppose, because he took it at last and tied it quickly round his waist under the jacket, on his bare skin.

Our eyes met; several seconds elapsed, till, our glances still mingled, I extended my hand and turned the lamp out. Then I passed through the cuddy, leaving the door of my room wide open . . . 'Steward!'

He was still lingering in the pantry in the greatness of his zeal, giving a rub-up to a plated cruet-stand the last thing before going to bed. Being careful not to wake up the mate, whose room was opposite, I spoke in an undertone.

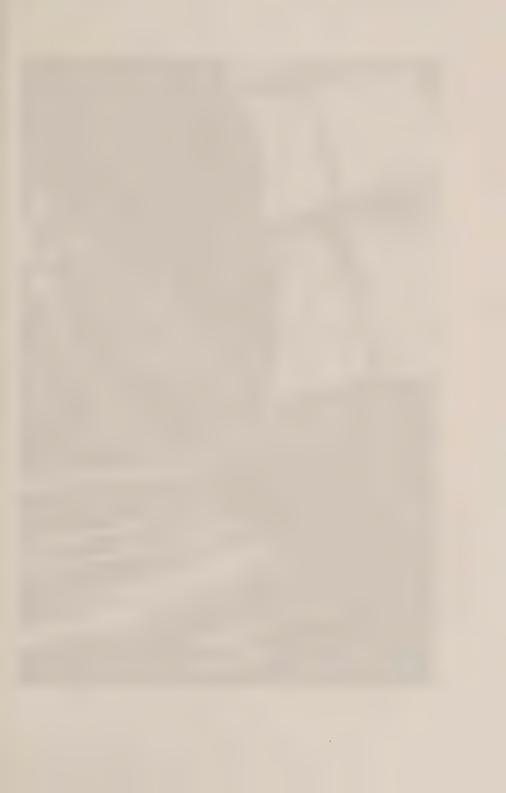
He looked round anxiously. 'Sir!'

'Can you get me a little hot water from the galley?'

'I am afraid, sir, the galley fire's been out for some time now.'

'Go and see.'

He fled up the stairs.





'Now,' I whispered loudly into the saloon—too loudly, perhaps, but I was afraid I couldn't make a sound. He was by my side in an instant—the double captain slipped past the stairs—through a tiny dark passage . . . a sliding door. We were in the sail-locker, scrambling on our knees over the sails. A sudden thought struck me. I saw myself wandering barefooted, bareheaded, the sun beating on my dark poll. I snatched off my floppy hat and tried hurriedly in the dark to ram it on my other self. He dodged and fended off silently. I wonder what he thought had come to me before he understood and suddenly desisted. Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second . . . No word was breathed by either of us when they separated.

I was standing quietly by the pantry door when the steward returned. 'Sorry, sir. Kettle barely warm. Shall I light the spirit-lamp?'

'Never mind.'

I came out on deck slowly. It was now a matter of conscience to shave the land as close as possible—for now he must go overboard whenever the ship was put in stays. Must! There could be no going back for him. After a moment I walked over to leeward and my heart flew into my mouth at the nearness of the land on the bow. Under any other circumstances I would not have held on a minute longer. The second mate had followed me anxiously.

I looked on till I felt I could command my voice.

'She will weather,' I said then in a quiet tone.

'Are you going to try that, sir?' he stammered out incredulously.

I took no notice of him and raised my tone just enough to be heard by the helmsman.

'Keep her good full.'

'Good full, sir.'

The wind fanned my cheek, the sails slept, the world was silent. The strain of watching the dark loom of the land grow bigger and denser was too much for me. I had shut my eyes—because the ship must go closer. She must! The stillness was intolerable. Were we standing still?

When I opened my eyes the second view started my heart with a thump. The black southern hill of Koh-ring seemed to hang right over the ship like a towering fragment of the everlasting night. On that enormous mass of blackness there was not a gleam to be seen, not a sound to be heard. It was gliding irresistibly toward us and yet seemed

already within reach of the hand. I saw the vague figures of the watch grouped in the waist, gazing in awed silence.

'Are you going on, sir?' enquired an unsteady voice at my elbow.

I ignored it. I had to go on.

'Keep her full. Don't check her way. That won't do now,' I said warningly.

'I can't see the sails very well,' the helmsman answered me, in

strange, quavering tones.

Was she close enough? Already she was, I won't say in the shadow of the land, but in the very blackness of it, already swallowed up as it were, gone too close to be recalled, gone from me altogether.

'Give the mate a call,' I said to the young man who stood at my

elbow as still as death. 'And turn all hands up.'

My tone had a borrowed loudness reverberated from the height of the land. Several voices cried out together, 'We are all on deck, sir.'

Then stillness again, with the great shadow gliding closer, towering higher, without a light, without a sound. Such a hush had fallen on the ship that she might have been a barque of the dead floating in slowly under the very gate of Erebus.

'My God! Where are we?'

It was the mate moaning at my elbow. He was thunderstruck, and as it were deprived of the moral support of his whiskers. He clapped his hands and absolutely cried out, 'Lost!'

'Be quiet,' I said sternly.

He lowered his tone, but I saw the shadowy gesture of his despair. 'What are we doing here?'

'Looking for the land wind.'

He made as if to tear his hair, and addressed me recklessly.

'She will never get out. You have done it, sir. I knew it'd end in something like this. She will never weather, and you are too close now to stay. She'll drift ashore before she's round. O my God!'

I caught his arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head,

and shook it violently.

'She's ashore already,' he wailed, trying to tear himself away.

'Is she? . . . Keep good full there!'

'Good full, sir,' cried the helmsman in a frightened, thin, childlike voice.

I hadn't let go the mate's arm, and went on shaking it. 'Ready about,

do you hear? You go forward'—shake—'and stop there'—shake—'and hold your noise'—shake—'and see these head-sheets properly overhauled'—shake, shake—shake.

And all the time I dared not look toward the land lest my heart should fail me. I released my grip at last and he ran forward as if fleeing for dear life.

I wondered what my double there in the sail-locker thought of this commotion. He was able to hear everything—and perhaps he was able to understand why, on my conscience, it had to be thus close—no less. My first order 'Hard alee!' re-echoed ominously under the towering shadow of Koh-ring as if I had shouted in a mountain gorge. And then I watched the land intently. In that smooth water and light wind it was impossible to feel the ship coming-to. No! I could not feel her. And my second self was making now ready to slip out and lower himself overboard. Perhaps he was gone already . . . ?

The great black mass brooding over our very mast-heads began to pivot away from the ship's side silently. And now I forgot the secret stranger ready to depart, and remembered only that I was a total stranger to the ship. I did not know her. Would she do it? How was she to be handled?

I swung the mainyard and waited helplessly. She was perhaps stopped, and her very fate hung in the balance, with the black mass of Koh-ring like the gate of the everlasting night towering over her taffrail. What would she do now? Had she way on her yet? I stepped to the side swiftly, and on the shadowy water I could see nothing except a faint phosphorescent flash revealing the glassy smoothness of the sleeping surface. It was impossible to tell—and I had not learned yet the feel of my ship. Was she moving? What I needed was something easily seen, a piece of paper, which I could throw overboard and watch. I had nothing on me. To run down for it I didn't dare. There was no time. All at once my strained, yearning stare distinguished a white object floating within a yard of the ship's side—white, on the black water. A phosphorescent flash passed under it. What was that thing? . . . I recognised my own floppy hat. It must have fallen off his head . . . and he didn't bother. Now I had what I wanted—the saving mark for my eyes. But I hardly thought of my other self, now gone from the ship, to be hidden for ever from all friendly faces, to be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, with no brand of the curse on

his sane forehead to stay a slaying hand . . . too proud to explain.

And I watched the hat—the expression of my sudden pity for his mere flesh. It had been meant to save his homeless head from the dangers of the sun. And now—behold—it was saving the ship, by serving me for a mark to help out the ignorance of my strangeness. Ha! It was drifting forward, warning me just in time that the ship had gathered sternway.

'Shift the helm,' I said in a low voice to the seaman standing still like

a statue.

The man's eyes glistened wildly in the binnacle light as he jumped

round to the other side and spun round the wheel.

I walked to the break of the poop. On the overshadowed deck all hands stood by the fore-braces waiting for my order. The stars ahead seemed to be gliding from right to left. And all was so still in the world that I heard the quiet remark, 'She's round,' passed in a tone of intense relief between two seamen.

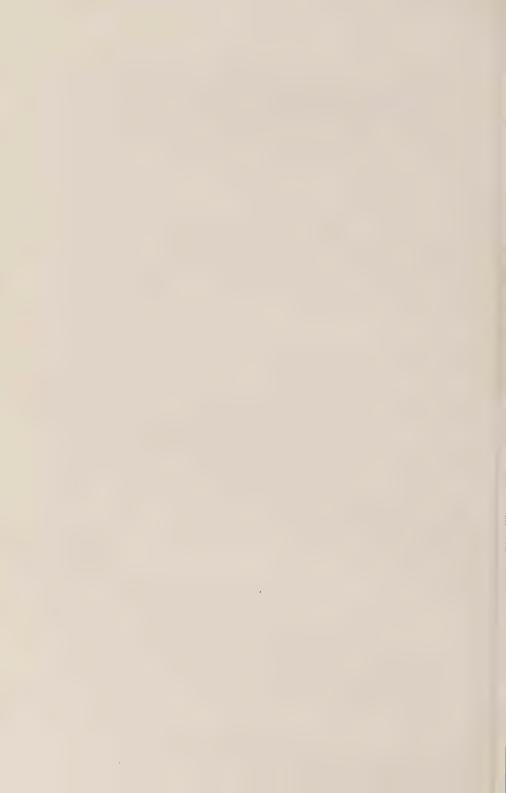
'Let go and haul.'

The foreyards ran round with a great noise, amidst cheery cries. And now the frightful whiskers made themselves heard giving various orders. Already the ship was drawing ahead. And I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command.

Walking to the taffrail, I was in time to make out, on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus—yes, I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny.

## Freya of the Seven Isles

A STORY OF SHALLOW WATERS





One day—and that day was many years ago now—I received a long, chatty letter from one of my old chums and fellow wanderers in Eastern waters. He was still out there, but settled down, and middle-aged; I imagined him grown portly in figure and domestic in his habits; in short, overtaken by the fate common to all except to those who, being specially beloved by the gods, get knocked on the head early. The letter was of the reminiscent 'do you remember' kind—a wistful letter of backward glances. And, amongst other things, 'Surely you remember old Nelson,' he wrote.

Remember old Nelson! Certainly. And to begin with, his name was not Nelson. The Englishmen in the archipelago called him Nelson because it was more convenient, I suppose, and he never protested. It would have been mere pedantry. The true form of his name was Nielsen. He had come out East long before the advent of telegraph cables, had served English firms, had married an English girl, had been one of us for years, trading and sailing in all directions through the Eastern Archipelago, across and around, transversely, diagonally, perpendicularly, in semicircles, and zigzags, and figures of eight, for years and years.

There was no nook or cranny of these tropical waters that the enterprise of old Nelson (or Nielsen) had not penetrated in an eminently pacific way. His tracks, if plotted out, would have covered the map of the archipelago like a cobweb—all of it, with the sole exception of the Philippines. He would never approach that part, from a strange dread of Spaniards, or, to be exact, of the Spanish authorities. What he imagined they could do to him it is impossible to say. Perhaps at some time in his life he had read some stories of the Inquisition.

But he was in general afraid of what he called 'authorities'; not the English authorities, which he trusted and respected, but the other two of that part of the world. He was not so horrified at the Dutch as he was at the Spaniards, but he was even more mistrustful of them. Very mistrustful indeed. The Dutch, in his view, were capable of 'playing any ugly trick on a man' who had the misfortune to displease them. There were their laws and regulations, but they had no notion of fair play in applying them. It was really pitiable to see the anxious circumspection

of his dealings with some official or other, and remember that this man had been known to stroll up to a village of cannibals in New Guinea in a quiet, fearless manner (and note that he was always fleshy all his life, and, if I may say so, an appetising morsel) on some matter of barter that

did not amount perhaps to fifty pounds in the end.

Remember old Nelson! Rather! Truly, none of us in my generation had known him in his active days. He was 'retired' in our time. He had bought, or else leased, part of a small island from the Sultan of a little group called the Seven Isles, not far north from Banka. It was, I suppose, a legitimate transaction, but I have no doubt that had he been an Englishman the Dutch would have discovered a reason to fire him out without ceremony. In this connection the real form of his name stood him in good stead. In the character of an unassuming Dane whose conduct was most correct, they let him be. With all his money engaged in cultivation he was naturally careful not to give even the shadow of offence, and it was mostly for prudential reasons of that sort that he did not look with a favourable eye on Jasper Allen. But of that later. Yes! One remembered well enough old Nelson's big, hospitable bungalow erected on a shelving point of land, his portly form, costumed generally in a white shirt and trousers (he had a confirmed habit of taking off his alpaca jacket on the slightest provocation), his round blue eyes, his straggly, sandy-white moustache sticking out all ways like the guills of the fretful porcupine, his propensity to sit down suddenly and fan himself with his hat. But there's no use concealing the fact that what one remembered really was his daughter, who at that time came out to live with him—and be a sort of Lady of the Isles.

Freya Nelson (or Nielsen) was the kind of girl one remembers. The oval of her face was perfect; and within that fascinating frame the most happy disposition of line and feature, with an admirable complexion, gave an impression of health, strength, and what I might call unconscious self-confidence—a most pleasant and, as it were, whimsical determination. I will not compare her eyes to violets, because the real shade of their colour was peculiar, not so dark and more lustrous. They were of the wide-open kind, and looked at one frankly in every mood. I never did see the long, dark eyelashes lowered—I daresay Jasper Allen did, being a privileged person—but I have no doubt that the expression must have been charming in a complex way. She could—Jasper told me once with a touchingly imbecile exultation—sit on her hair. I daresay, I

daresay. It was not for me to behold these wonders; I was content to admire the neat and becoming way she used to do it up so as not to conceal the good shape of her head. And this wealth of hair was so glossy that when the screens of the west verandah were down, making a pleasant twilight there, or in the shade of the grove of fruit-trees near the house, it seemed to give out a golden light of its own.

She dressed generally in a white frock, with a skirt of walking length, showing her neat, laced, brown boots. If there was any colour about her costume it was just a bit of blue perhaps. No exertion seemed to distress her. I have seen her land from the dinghy after a long pull in the sun (she rowed herself about a good deal) with no quickened breath and not a single hair out of its place. In the morning when she came out on the verandah for the first look westward, Sumatra way, over the sea, she seemed as fresh and sparkling as a dewdrop. But a dewdrop is evanescent, and there was nothing evanescent about Freya. I remember her round, solid arms with the fine wrists, and her broad, capable hands with tapering fingers.

I don't know whether she was actually born at sea, but I do know that up to twelve years of age she sailed about with her parents in various ships. After old Nelson lost his wife it became a matter of serious concern for him what to do with the girl. A kind lady in Singapore, touched by his dumb grief and deplorable perplexity, offered to take charge of Freya. This arrangement lasted some six years, during which old Nelson (or Nielsen) 'retired' and established himself on his island, and then it was settled (the kind lady going away to Europe) that his daughter should join him.

As the first and most important preparation for that event the old fellow ordered from his Singapore agent a Steyn & Ebhart's 'upright grand'. I was then commanding a little steamer in the island trade, and it fell to my lot to take it out to him, so I know something of Freya's 'upright grand'. We landed the enormous packing-case with difficulty on a flat piece of rock amongst some bushes, nearly knocking the bottom out of one of my boats in the course of that nautical operation. Then, all my crew assisting, engineers and firemen included, by the exercise of much anxious ingenuity, and by means of rollers, levers, tackles, and inclined planes of soaped planks, toiling in the sun like ancient Egyptians at the building of a pyramid, we got it as far as the house and up on to the edge of the west verandah—which was the

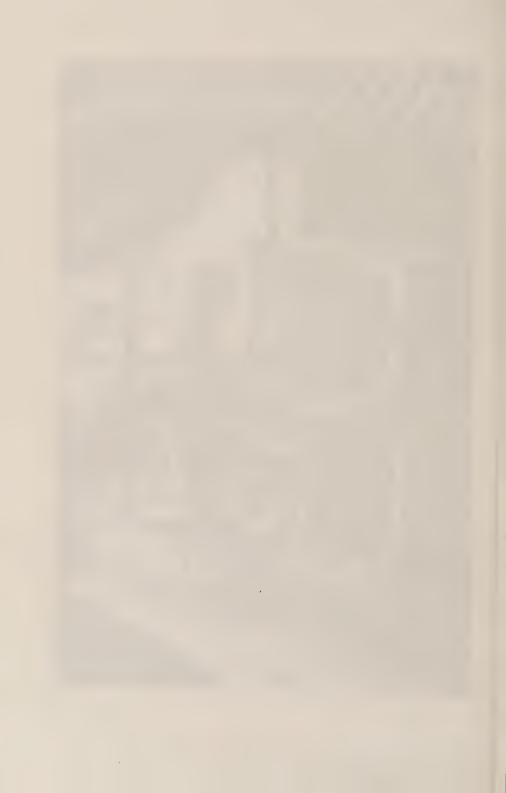
actual drawing-room of the bungalow. There, the case being ripped off cautiously, the beautiful rosewood monster stood revealed at last. In reverent excitement we coaxed it against the wall and drew the first free breath of the day. It was certainly the heaviest movable object on that islet since the creation of the world. The volume of sound it gave out in that bungalow (which acted as a sounding-board) was really astonishing. It thundered sweetly right over the sea. Jasper Allen told me that early of a morning on the deck of the Bonito (his wonderfully fast and pretty brig) he could hear Freya playing her scales quite distinctly. But the fellow always anchored foolishly close to the point, as I told him more than once. Of course, these seas are almost uniformly serene, and the Seven Isles is a particularly calm and cloudless spot as a rule. But still, now and again, an afternoon thunderstorm over Banka, or even one of those vicious thick squalls, from the distant Sumatra coast, would make a sudden sally upon the group, enveloping it for a couple of hours in whirlwinds and bluish-black murk of a particularly sinister aspect. Then, with the lowered rattan screens rattling desperately in the wind and the bungalow shaking all over, Freva would sit down to the piano and play fierce Wagner music in the flicker of blinding flashes, with thunderbolts falling all round, enough to make your hair stand on end; and Jasper would remain stock-still on the verandah, adoring the back view of her supple, swaying figure, the miraculous sheen of her fair head, the rapid hands on the keys, the white nape of her neckwhile the brig, down at the point there, surged at her cables within a hundred yards of nasty, shiny, black rock-heads. Ugh!

And this, if you please, for no reason but that, when he went on board at night and laid his head on the pillow, he should feel that he was as near as he could conveniently get to his Freya slumbering in the bungalow. Did you ever! And, mind, this brig was the home to be—their home—the floating paradise which he was gradually fitting out like a yacht to sail his life blissfully away in with Freya! Imbecile! But the fel-

low was always taking chances.

One day, I remember I watched with Freya on the verandah the brig approaching the point from the northward. I suppose Jasper made the girl out with his long glass. What does he do? Instead of standing on for another mile and a half along the shoals and then tacking for the anchorage in a proper and seamanlike manner, he spies a gap between two disgusting old jagged reefs, puts the helm down suddenly, and





shoots the brig through, with all her sails shaking and rattling, so that we could hear the racket on the verandah. I drew my breath through my teeth, I can tell you, and Freya swore. Yes! She clenched her capable fists and stamped with her pretty brown boot and said 'Damn!' Then, looking at me with a little heightened colour—not much—she remarked, 'I forgot you were there,' and laughed. To be sure, to be sure. When Jasper was in sight she was not likely to remember that anybody else in the world was there. In my concern at this mad trick I couldn't help appealing to her sympathetic common sense.

'Isn't he a fool?' I said, with feeling.

'Perfect idiot,' she agreed warmly, looking at me straight with her wide-open, earnest eyes and the dimple of a smile on her cheek.

'And that,' I pointed out to her, 'just to save twenty minutes or so in meeting you.'

We heard the anchor go down, and then she became very resolute and threatening.

'Wait a bit. I'll teach him.'

She went into her own room and shut the door, leaving me alone on the verandah with my instructions. Long before the brig's sails were furled, Jasper came up three steps at a time, forgetting to say how d'ye do, and looking right and left eagerly.

'Where's Freya? Wasn't she here just now?'

When I explained to him that he was to be deprived of Miss Freya's presence for a whole hour, 'just to teach him', he said I had put her up to it, no doubt, and that he feared he would have yet to shoot me some day. She and I were getting too thick together. Then he flung himself into a chair and tried to talk to me about his trip. But the funny thing was that the fellow actually suffered. I could see it. His voice failed him, and he sat there dumb, looking at the door with the face of a man in pain. Fact . . . And the next still funnier thing was that the girl calmly walked out of her room in less than ten minutes. And then I left. I mean to say that I went away to seek old Nelson (or Nielsen) on the back verandah, which was his own special nook in the distribution of that house, with the kind purpose of engaging him in conversation lest he should start roaming about and intrude unwittingly where he was not wanted just then.

He knew that the brig had arrived, though he did not know that Jasper was already with his daughter. I suppose he didn't think it was

possible in the time. A father naturally wouldn't. He suspected that Allen was sweet on his girl; the fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea, most of the traders in the archipelago, and all sorts and conditions of men in the town of Singapore were aware of it. But he was not capable of appreciating how far the girl was gone on the fellow. He had an idea that Freya was too sensible ever to be gone on anybody—I mean to an unmanageable extent. No; it was not that which made him sit on the back verandah and worry himself in his unassuming manner during Jasper's visits. What he worried about were the Dutch 'authorities'. For it is a fact that the Dutch looked askance at the doings of Jasper Allen, owner and master of the brig Bonito. They considered him much too enterprising in his trading. I don't know that he ever did anything illegal; but it seems to me that his immense activity was repulsive to their stolid character and slow-going methods. Anyway, in old Nelson's opinion, the captain of the Bonito was a smart sailor, and a nice young man, but not a desirable acquaintance upon the whole. Somewhat compromising, you understand. On the other hand, he did not like to tell Jasper in so many words to keep away. Poor old Nelson himself was a nice fellow. I believe he would have shrunk from hurting the feelings even of a mop-headed cannibal, unless, perhaps, under very strong provocation. I mean the feelings, not the bodies. As against spears, knives, hatchets, clubs, or arrows, old Nelson had proved himself capable of taking his own part. In every other respect he had a timorous soul. So he sat on the back verandah with a concerned expression, and whenever the voices of his daughter and Jasper Allen reached him, he would blow out his cheeks and let the air escape with a dismal sound. like a much-tried man.

Naturally I derided his fears, which he, more or less, confided to me. He had a certain regard for my judgement, and a certain respect, not for my moral qualities, however, but for the good terms I was supposed to be on with the Dutch 'authorities'. I knew for a fact that his greatest bugbear, the Governor of Banka—a charming, peppery, hearty, retired rear-admiral—had a distinct liking for him. This consoling assurance, which I used always to put forward, made old Nelson (or Nielsen) brighten up for a moment; but in the end he would shake his head doubtfully, as much as to say that this was all very well, but that there were depths in the Dutch official nature which no one but himself had ever fathomed. Perfectly ridiculous!

On this occasion I am speaking of, old Nelson was even fretty; for while I was trying to entertain him with a very funny and somewhat scandalous adventure which happened to a certain acquaintance of ours in Saigon, he exclaimed suddenly:

'What the devil he wants to turn up here for!'

Clearly he had not heard a word of the anecdote. And this annoyed me, because the anecdote was really good. I stared at him.

'Come, come!' I cried. 'Don't you know what Jasper Allen is turning up here for?'

This was the first open allusion I had ever made to the true state of

affairs between Jasper and his daughter. He took it very calmly.

'Oh, Freya is a sensible girl!' he murmured absently, his mind's eye obviously fixed on the 'authorities'. No; Freya was no fool. He was not concerned about that. He didn't mind it in the least. The fellow was just company for her; he amused the girl; nothing more.

When the perspicacious old chap left off mumbling, all was still in the house. The other two were amusing themselves very quietly, and no doubt very heartily. What more absorbing and less noisy amusement could they have found than to plan their future? Side by side on the verandah they must have been looking at the brig, the third party in that fascinating game. Without her there would have been no future. She was the fortune and the home, and the great free world for them. Who was it that likened a ship to a prison? May I be ignominiously hanged at a yard-arm if that's true. The white sails of that craft were the white wings—pinions, I believe, would be the more poetical style—well, the white pinions, of their soaring love. Soaring as regards Jasper. Freya, being a woman, kept a better hold of the mundane connections of this affair.

But Jasper was elevated in the true sense of the word ever since the day when, after they had been gazing at the brig in one of those decisive silences that alone establish a perfect communion between creatures gifted with speech, he proposed that she should share the ownership of that treasure with him. Indeed, he presented the brig to her altogether. But then his heart was in the brig since the day he bought her in Manilla from a certain middle-aged Peruvian, in a sober suit of black broadcloth, enigmatic and sententious, who, for all I know, might have stolen her on the South American coast, whence he said he had come over to the Philippines 'for family reasons'. This 'for family reasons'

was distinctly good. No true caballero would care to push on enquiries after such a statement.

Indeed, Jasper was quite the caballero. The brig herself was then all black and enigmatical, and very dirty; a tarnished gem of the sea, or, rather, a neglected work of art. For he must have been an artist, the obscure builder who had put her body together on lovely lines out of the hardest tropical timber fastened with the purest copper. Goodness only knows in what part of the world she was built. Jasper himself had not been able to ascertain much of her history from his sententious, saturnine Peruvian—if the fellow was a Peruvian, and not the devil himself in disguise, as Jasper jocularly pretended to believe. My opinion is that she was old enough to have been one of the last pirates, a slaver perhaps, or else an opium clipper of the early days, if not an opium smuggler.

However that may be, she was as sound as on the day she first took the water, sailed like a witch, steered like a little boat, and, like some fair women of adventurous life famous in history, seemed to have the secret of perpetual youth; so that there was nothing unnatural in Jasper Allen treating her like a lover. And that treatment restored the lustre of her beauty. He clothed her in many coats of the very best white paint so skilfully, carefully, artistically put on and kept clean by his badgered crew of picked Malays, that no costly enamel such as jewellers use for their work could have looked better and felt smoother to the touch. A narrow gilt moulding defined her elegant sheer as she sat on the water, eclipsing easily the professional good looks of any pleasure-yacht that ever came to the East in those days. For myself, I must say I prefer a moulding of deep crimson colour on a white hull. It gives a stronger relief, besides being less expensive; and I told Jasper so. But no, nothing less than the best gold-leaf would do, because no decoration could be gorgeous enough for the future abode of his Freya.

His feelings for the brig and for the girl were as indissolubly united in his heart as you may fuse two precious metals together in one crucible. And the flame was pretty hot, I can assure you. It induced in him a fierce inward restlessness both of activity and desire. Too fine in face, with a lateral wave in his chestnut hair, spare, long-limbed, with an eager glint in his steely eyes and quick, brusque movements, he made me think sometimes of a flashing sword-blade perpetually leaping out of the scabbard. It was only when he was near the girl, when he had her there to look at, that this peculiarly tense attitude was replaced by a

grave, devout watchfulness of her slightest movements and utterances. Her cool, resolute, capable, good-humoured self-possession seemed to steady his heart. Was it the magic of her face, of her voice, of her glances which calmed him so? Yet these were the very things one must believe which had set his imagination ablaze—if love begins in imagination. But I am no man to discuss such mysteries, and it strikes me that we have neglected poor old Nelson inflating his cheeks in a state of worry on the back verandah.

I pointed out to him that, after all, Jasper was not a very frequent visitor. He and his brig worked hard all over the archipelago. But all old Nelson said, and he said it uneasily, was:

'I hope Heemskirk won't turn up here while the brig's about.'

Getting up a scare about Heemskirk now! Heemskirk! . . . Really, one hadn't the patience—



For, pray, who was Heemskirk? You shall see at once how unreasonable this dread of Heemskirk . . . Certainly, his nature was malevolent enough. That was obvious, directly you heard him laugh. Nothing gives away more a man's secret disposition than the unguarded ring of his laugh. But, bless my soul! if we were to start at every evil guffaw like a hare at every sound, we shouldn't be fit for anything but the solitude of a desert, or the seclusion of a hermitage. And even there we should have to put up with the unavoidable company of the devil.

However, the devil is a considerable personage, who has known better days and has moved high up in the hierarchy of Celestial Host; but in the hierarchy of mere earthly Dutchmen, Heemskirk, whose early days could not have been very splendid, was merely a naval officer forty years of age, of no particular connections or ability to boast of. He was commanding the *Neptun*, a little gunboat employed on dreary patrol duty up and down the archipelago, to look after the traders. Not a very exalted position truly. I tell you, just a common middle-aged lieutenant of some twenty-five years' service, and sure to be retired before long, that's all.

He never bothered his head very much as to what was going on in the Seven Isles group till he learned from some talk in Mintok or

Palembang, I suppose, that there was a pretty girl living there. Curiosity, I presume, caused him to go poking around that way, and then, after he had once seen Freya, he made a practice of calling at the group whenever he found himself within half a day's steaming from it.

I don't mean to say that Heemskirk was a typical Dutch naval officer. I have seen enough of them not to fall into that absurd mistake. He had a big, clean-shaven face; great flat, brown cheeks, with a thin, hooked nose and a small, pursy mouth squeezed in between. There were a few silver threads in his black hair, and his unpleasant eyes were nearly black too. He had a surly way of casting side-glances without moving his head, which was set low on a short, round neck. A thick, round trunk, in a dark undress jacket with gold shoulder-straps, was sustained by a straddly pair of thick, round legs, in white drill trousers. His round skull under a white cap looked as if it were immensely thick too, but there were brains enough in it to discover and take advantage maliciously of poor old Nelson's nervousness before everything that was invested with the merest shred of authority.

Heemskirk would land on the point and perambulate silently every part of the plantation as if the whole place belonged to him, before he went to the house. On the verandah he would take the best chair, and would stay for tiffin or dinner, just simply stay on, without taking the trouble to invite himself by so much as a word.

He ought to have been kicked, if only for his manner to Miss Freya. Had he been a naked savage, armed with spears and poisoned arrows, old Nelson (or Nielsen) would have gone for him with his bare fists. But these gold shoulder-straps—Dutch shoulder-straps at that—were enough to terrify the old fellow; so he let the beggar treat him with heavy contempt, devour his daughter with his eyes, and drink the best part of his little stock of wine.

I saw something of this, and on one occasion I tried to pass a remark on the subject. It was pitiable to see the trouble in old Nelson's round eyes. At first he cried out that the lieutenant was a good friend of his; a very good fellow. I went on staring at him pretty hard, so that at last he faltered, and had to own that, of course, Heemskirk was not a very genial person outwardly, but all the same at bottom . . .

'I haven't yet met a genial Dutchman out here,' I interrupted. 'Geniality, after all, is not of much consequence, but don't you see——' Nelson looked suddenly so frightened at what I was going to say that

I hadn't the heart to go on. Of course, I was going to tell him that the fellow was after his girl. That just describes it exactly. What Heemskirk might have expected or what he thought he could do, I don't know. For all I can tell, he might have imagined himself irresistible, or have taken Freya for what she was not, on account of her lively, assured, unconstrained manner. But there it is. He was after that girl. Nelson could see it well enough. Only he preferred to ignore it. He did not want to be told of it.

'All I want is to live in peace and quietness with the Dutch authorities,' he mumbled shamefacedly.

He was incurable. I was sorry for him, and I really think Miss Freya was sorry for her father too. She restrained herself for his sake, and like everything she did she did it simply, unaffectedly, and even goodhumouredly. No small effort that, because in Heemskirk's attentions there was an insolent touch of scorn, hard to put up with. Dutchmen of that sort are overbearing to their inferiors, and that officer of the King looked upon old Nelson and Freya as quite beneath him in every way.

I can't say I felt sorry for Freya. She was not the sort of girl to take anything tragically. One could feel for her and sympathise with her difficulty, but she seemed equal to any situation. It was rather admiration she extorted by her competent serenity. It was only when Jasper and Heemskirk were together at the bungalow, as it happened now and then, that she felt the strain, and even then it was not for everybody to see. My eyes alone could detect a faint shadow on the radiance of her personality. Once I could not help saying to her appreciatively:

'Upon my word, you are wonderful.'

She let it pass with a faint smile.

'The great thing is to prevent Jasper becoming unreasonable,' she said; and I could see real concern lurking in the quiet depths of her frank eyes gazing straight at me. 'You will help to keep him quiet, won't you?'

'Of course, we must keep him quiet,' I declared, understanding very well the nature of her anxiety. 'He's such a lunatic, too, when he's roused.'

'He is!' she assented in a soft tone; for it was our joke to speak of Jasper abusively. 'But I have tamed him a bit. He's quite a good boy now.'

'He would squash Heemskirk like a black-beetle all the same,' I remarked.

'Rather!' she murmured. 'And that wouldn't do,' she added quickly. 'Imagine the state poor papa would get into. Besides, I mean to be mistress of the dear brig and sail about these seas, not go off wandering ten thousand miles away from here.'

'The sooner you are on board to look after the man and the brig the better,' I said seriously. 'They need you to steady them both a bit. I don't think Jasper will ever get sobered down till he has carried you off from this island. You don't see him when he is away from you, as I do.

He's in a state of perpetual elation which almost frightens me.'

At this she smiled again, and then looked serious. For it could not be unpleasant to her to be told of her power, and she had some sense of her responsibility. She slipped away from me suddenly, because Heemskirk, with old Nelson in attendance at his elbow, was coming up the steps of the verandah. Directly his head came above the level of the floor his ill-natured black eyes shot glances here and there.

'Where's your girl, Nelson?' he asked, in a tone as if every soul in the world belonged to him. And then to me, 'The goddess has flown, eh?'

Nelson's Cove—as we used to call it—was crowded with shipping that day. There was first my steamer, then the *Neptun* gunboat further out, and the *Bonito* brig, anchored as usual so close inshore that it looked as if, with a little skill and judgement, one could shy a hat from the verandah on to her scrupulously holystoned quarterdeck. Her brasses flashed like gold, her white body-paint had a sheen like a satin robe. The rake of her varnished spars and the big yards, squared to a hair, gave her a sort of martial elegance. She was a beauty. No wonder that in possession of a craft like that and the promise of a girl like Freya, Jasper lived in a state of perpetual elation fit, perhaps, for the seventh heaven, but not exactly safe in a world like ours.

I remarked politely to Heemskirk that, with three guests in the house, Miss Freya had no doubt domestic matters to attend to. I knew, of course, that she had gone to meet Jasper at a certain cleared spot on the banks of the only stream on Nelson's little island. The commander of the *Neptun* gave me a dubious black look, and began to make himself at home, flinging his thick, cylindrical carcass into a rocking-chair, and unbuttoning his coat. Old Nelson sat down opposite him in a most unassuming manner, staring anxiously with his round eyes and fanning himself with his hat. I tried to make conversation to while the time away; not an easy task with a morose, enamoured Dutchman constantly

looking from one door to another and answering one's advances either with a jeer or a grunt.

However, the evening passed off all right. Luckily, there is a degree of bliss too intense for elation. Jasper was quiet and concentrated silently in watching Freya. As we went on board our respective ships I offered to give his brig a tow out next morning. I did it on purpose to get him away at the earliest possible moment. So in the first cold light of the dawn we passed by the gunboat lying black and still without a sound in her at the mouth of the glassy cove. But with tropical swiftness the sun had climbed twice its diameter above the horizon before we had rounded the reef and got abreast of the point. On the biggest boulder there stood Freya, all in white and, in her helmet, like a feminine and martial statue with a rosy face, as I could see very well with my glasses. She fluttered an expressive handkerchief, and Jasper, running up the main rigging of the white and warlike brig, waved his hat in response. Shortly afterwards we parted, I to the northward, and Jasper heading east with a light wind on the quarter, for Banjermassin and two other ports, I believe it was, that trip.

This peaceful occasion was the last on which I saw all these people assembled together: the charmingly fresh and resolute Freya, the innocently round-eyed old Nelson, Jasper, keen, long-limbed, lean-faced, admirably self-contained, in his manner, because inconceivably happy under the eyes of his Freya; all three tall, fair, and blue-eyed in varied shades, and amongst them the swarthy, arrogant, black-haired Dutchman, shorter nearly by a head, and so much thicker than any of them that he seemed to be a creature capable of inflating itself, a grotesque specimen of mankind from some other planet.

The contrast struck me all at once as we stood in the lighted verandah, after rising from the dinner-table. I was fascinated by it for the rest of the evening, and I remember the impression of something funny and ill-omened at the same time in it to this day.



A few weeks later, coming early one morning into Singapore, from a journey to the southward, I saw the brig lying at anchor in all her usual symmetry and splendour of aspect as though she had been taken out

of a glass case and put delicately into the water that very moment.

She was well out in the roadstead, but I steamed in and took up my habitual berth close in front of the town. Before we had finished breakfast a quartermaster came to tell me that Captain Allen's boat was coming our way.

His smart gig dashed alongside, and in two bounds he was up our accommodation-ladder and shaking me by the hand with his nervous grip, his eyes snapping inquisitively, for he supposed I had called at the Seven Isles group on my way. I reached into my pocket for a nicely folded little note, which he grabbed out of my hand without ceremony and carried off on the bridge to read by himself. After a decent interval I followed him up there, and found him pacing to and fro; for the nature of his emotions made him restless even in his most thoughtful moments.

He shook his head at me triumphantly.

'Well, my dear boy,' he said, 'I shall be counting the days now.'

I understood what he meant. I knew that those young people had settled already on a runaway match without official preliminaries. This was really a logical decision. Old Nelson (or Nielsen) would never have agreed to give up Freya peaceably to this compromising Jasper. Heavens! What would the Dutch authorities say to such a match! It sounds too ridiculous for words. But there's nothing in the world more selfishly hard than a timorous man in a fright about his 'little estate', as old Nelson used to call it in apologetic accents. A heart permeated by a particular sort of funk is proof against sense, feeling, and ridicule. It's a flint.

Jasper would have made his request all the same and then taken his own way; but it was Freya who decided that nothing should be said, on the ground that, 'Papa would only worry himself to distraction.' He was capable of making himself ill, and then she wouldn't have the heart to leave him. Here you have the sanity of feminine outlook and the frankness of feminine reasoning. And for the rest, Miss Freya could read 'poor dear papa' in the way a woman reads a man—like an open book. His daughter once gone, old Nelson would not worry himself. He would raise a great outcry, and make no end of lamentable fuss, but that's not the same thing. The real agonies of indecision, the anguish of conflicting feelings would be spared to him. And as he was too unassuming to rage, he would, after a period of lamentation, devote

himself to his 'little estate', and to keeping on good terms with the authorities.

Time would do the rest. And Freya thought she could afford to wait, while ruling over her own home in the beautiful brig and over the man who loved her. This was the life for her who had learned to walk on a ship's deck. She was a ship-child, a sea-girl if ever there was one. And of course she loved Jasper and trusted him; but there was a shade of anxiety in her pride. It is very fine and romantic to possess for your very own a finely tempered and trusty sword-blade, but whether it is the best weapon to counter with the common cudgel-play of Fate—that's another question.

She knew that she had the more substance of the two—you needn't try any cheap jokes, I am not talking of their weights. She was just a little anxious while he was away, and she had me, who, being a tried confidant, took the liberty to whisper frequently 'The sooner the better.' But there was a peculiar vein of obstinacy in Miss Freya, and her reason for delay was characteristic. 'Not before my twenty-first birthday; so that there shall be no mistake in people's minds as to me being old enough to know what I am doing.'

Jasper's feelings were in such subjection that he had never even remonstrated against the decree. She was just splendid, whatever she did or said, and there was an end of it for him. I believe that he was subtle enough to be even flattered at bottom-at times. And then to console him he had the brig, which seemed pervaded by the spirit of Freya, since whatever he did on board was always done under the supreme sanction of his love.

'Yes. I'll soon begin to count the days,' he repeated. 'Eleven months

more. I'll have to crowd three trips into that.'

'Mind you don't come to grief trying to do too much,' I admonished him. But he dismissed my caution with a laugh and an elated gesture. Pooh! Nothing, nothing could happen to the brig, he cried, as if the flame of his heart could light up the dark nights of uncharted seas, and the image of Freya serve for an unerring beacon amongst hidden shoals: as if the winds had to wait on his future, the stars fight for it in their courses; as if the magic of his passion had the power to float a ship on a drop of dew or sail her through the eye of a needle—simply because it was her magnificent lot to be the servant of a love so full of grace as to make all the ways of the earth safe, resplendent, and easy.

'I suppose,' I said, after he had finished laughing at my innocent enough remark, 'I suppose you will be off today.'

That was what he meant to do. He had not gone at daylight only

because he expected me to come in.

'And only fancy what has happened yesterday,' he went on. 'My mate left me suddenly. Had to. And as there's nobody to be found at a short notice I am going to take Schultz with me. The notorious Schultz! Why don't you jump out of your skin? I tell you I went and unearthed Schultz late last evening, after no end of trouble. "I am your man, Captain," he says, in that wonderful voice of his, "but I am sorry to confess I have practically no clothes to my back. I have had to sell all my wardrobe to get a little food from day to day." What a voice that man has got. Talk about moving stones! But people seem to get used to it. I had never seen him before, and, upon my word, I felt suddenly tears rising to my eyes. Luckily it was dusk. He was sitting very quiet under a tree in a native compound as thin as a lath, and when I peered down at him all he had on was an old cotton singlet and a pair of ragged pyjamas. I bought him six white suits and two pairs of canvas shoes. Can't clear the ship without a mate. Must have somebody. I am going on shore presently to sign him on, and I shall take him with me as I go back on board to get under way. Now, I am a lunatic—am I not? Mad, of course. Come on! Lay it on thick. Let yourself go. I like to see you get excited.'

He so evidently expected me to scold that I took especial pleasure in

exaggerating the calmness of my attitude.

'The worst that can be brought up against Schultz', I began, folding my arms and speaking dispassionately, 'is an awkward habit of stealing the stores of every ship he has ever been in. He will do it. That's really all that's wrong. I don't credit absolutely that story Captain Robinson tells of Schultz conspiring in Chantabun with some ruffians in a Chinese junk to steal the anchor off the starboard bow of the *Bohemian Girl* schooner. Robinson's story is too ingenious altogether. That other tale of the engineers of the *Nan-Shan* finding Schultz at midnight in the engine-room busy hammering at the brass bearings to carry them off for sale on shore seems to me more authentic. Apart from this little weakness, let me tell you that Schultz is a smarter sailor than many who never took a drop of drink in their lives, and perhaps no worse morally than some men you and I know who have never stolen the value of a

penny. He may not be a desirable person to have on board one's ship, but since you have no choice he may be made to do, I believe. The important thing is to understand his psychology. Don't give him any money till you have done with him. Not a cent, if he begs you ever so. For as sure as fate the moment you give him any money he will begin to steal. Just remember that.'

I enjoyed Jasper's incredulous surprise.

'The devil he will!' he cried. 'What on earth for? Aren't you trying to pull my leg, old boy?'

'No. I'm not. You must understand Schultz's psychology. He's neither a loafer nor a cadger. He's not likely to wander about looking for somebody to stand him drinks. But suppose he goes on shore with five dollars, or fifty for that matter, in his pocket? After the third or fourth glass he becomes fuddled and charitable. He either drops his money all over the place, or else distributes the lot around; gives it to anyone who will take it. Then it occurs to him that the night is young yet, and that he may require a good many more drinks for himself and his friends before morning. So he starts off cheerfully for his ship. His legs never get affected nor his head either in the usual way. He gets aboard and simply grabs the first thing that seems to him suitable—the cabin lamp, a coil of rope, a bag of biscuits, a drum of oil—and converts it into money without thinking twice about it. This is the process and no other. You have only to look out that he doesn't get a start. That's all.'

'Confound his psychology,' muttered Jasper. 'But a man with a voice like his is fit to talk to the angels. Is he incurable, do you think?'

I said that I thought so. Nobody had prosecuted him yet, but no one would employ him any longer. His end would be, I feared, to starve in some hole or other.

'Ah, well,' reflected Jasper. 'The *Bonito* isn't trading to any ports of civilisation. That'll make it easier for him to keep straight.'

That was true. The brig's business was on uncivilised coasts, with obscure rajahs dwelling in nearly unknown bays; with native settlements up mysterious rivers opening their sombre, forest-lined estuaries among a welter of pale-green reefs and dazzling sandbanks, in lonely straits of calm blue water all aglitter with sunshine. Alone, far from the beaten tracks, she glided, all white, round dark, frowning headlands, stole out, silent like a ghost, from behind points of land stretching out all black in the moonlight; or lay hove-to, like a sleeping sea-bird, under

the shadow of some nameless mountain waiting for a signal. She would be glimpsed suddenly on misty, squally days dashing disdainfully aside the short, aggressive waves of the Java Sea; or be seen far, far away, a tiny dazzling white speck flying across the brooding purple masses of thunder-clouds piled up on the horizon. Sometimes, on the rare mail tracks, where civilisation brushes against wild mystery, when the naïve passengers crowding along the rail exclaimed, pointing at her with interest, 'Oh, here's a yacht!' the Dutch captain, with a hostile glance, would grunt contemptuously, 'Yacht! No! That's only English Jasper. A pedlar——'

'A good seaman, you say,' ejaculated Jasper, still in the matter of the

hopeless Schultz with the wonderfully touching voice.

'First rate. Ask anyone. Quite worth having—only impossible,' I declared.

'He shall have his chance to reform in the brig,' said Jasper, with a laugh. 'There will be no temptations either to drink or steal where I am going to this time.'

I didn't press him for anything more definite on that point. In fact, intimate as we were, I had a pretty clear notion of the general run of his business.

But as we were going ashore in his gig he asked suddenly, 'By the way, do you know where Heemskirk is?'

I eyed him covertly, and was reassured. He had asked the question, not as a lover, but as a trader. I told him that I had heard in Palembang that the *Neptun* was on duty down about Flores and Sumbawa. Quite out of his way. He expressed his satisfaction.

'You know,' he went on, 'that fellow, when he gets on the Borneo coast, amuses himself by knocking down my beacons. I have had to put up a few to help me in and out of the rivers. Early this year a Celebes trader becalmed in a proa was watching him at it. He steamed the gunboat full tilt at two of them, one after another, smashing them to pieces, and then lowered a boat on purpose to pull out a third, which I had a lot of trouble six months ago to stick up in the middle of a mud-flat for a tide-mark. Did you ever hear of anything more provoking—eh?'

'I wouldn't quarrel with the beggar,' I observed casually, yet disliking that piece of news strongly. 'It isn't worth while.'

'I quarrel?' cried Jasper. 'I don't want to quarrel. I don't want to hurt a single hair of his ugly head. My dear fellow, when I think of Freya's twenty-first birthday, all the world's my friend, Heemskirk included. It's a nasty, spiteful amusement, all the same.'

We parted rather hurriedly on the quay, each of us having his own pressing business to attend to. I would have been very much cut up had I known that this hurried grasp of the hand with 'So long, old boy. Good luck to you!' was the last of our partings.

On his return to the Straits I was away, and he was gone again before I got back. He was trying to achieve three trips before Freya's twenty-first birthday. At Nelson's Cove I missed him again by only a couple of days. Freya and I talked of 'that lunatic' and 'perfect idiot' with great delight and infinite appreciation. She was very radiant, with a more pronounced gaiety, notwithstanding that she had just parted from Jasper. But this was to be their last separation.

'Do get aboard as soon as you can, Miss Freya,' I entreated.

She looked me straight in the face, her colour a little heightened and with a sort of solemn ardour—if there was a little catch in her voice.

'The very next day.'

Ah yes! The very next day after her twenty-first birthday. I was pleased at this hint of deep feeling. It was as if she had grown impatient at last of the self-imposed delay. I supposed that Jasper's recent visit had told heavily.

'That's right,' I said approvingly. 'I shall be much easier in my mind when I know you have taken charge of that lunatic. Don't you lose a minute. He, of course, will be on time—unless heavens fall.'

'Yes. Unless——' she repeated in a thoughtful whisper, raising her eyes to the evening sky without a speck of cloud anywhere. Silent for a time, we let our eyes wander over the waters below, looking mysteriously still in the twilight, as if trustfully composed for a long, long dream in the warm, tropical night. And the peace all round us seemed without limits and without end.

And then we began again to talk Jasper over in our usual strain. We agreed that he was too reckless in many ways. Luckily, the brig was equal to the situation. Nothing apparently was tojo much for her. A perfect darling of a ship, said Miss Freya. She and her father had spent an afternoon on board. Jasper had given them some tea. Papa was grumpy . . . I had a vision of old Nelson under the brig's snowy awnings, nursing his unassuming vexation, and fanning himself with his hat. A comedy father . . . As a new instance of Jasper's lunacy, I was told that he

was distressed at his inability to have solid silver handles fitted to all the cabin doors. 'As if I would have let him!' commented Miss Freya, with amused indignation. Incidentally, I learned also that Schultz, the nautical kleptomaniac with the pathetic voice, was still hanging on to his job, with Miss Freya's approval. Jasper had confided to the lady of his heart his purpose of straightening out the fellow's psychology. Yes, indeed. All the world was his friend because it breathed the same air with Freya.

Somehow or other, I brought Heemskirk's name into the conversation, and, to my great surprise, startled Miss Freya. Her eyes expressed something like distress, while she bit her lip as if to contain an explosion of laughter. Oh yes. Heemskirk was at the bungalow at the same time with Jasper, but he arrived the day after. He left the same day as the brig, but a few hours later.

'What a nuisance he must have been to you two,' I said feelingly.

Her eyes flashed at me a sort of frightened merriment, and suddenly she exploded into a clear burst of laughter: 'Ha, ha, ha!'

I echoed it heartily, but not with the same charming tone: 'Ha, ha, ha! . . . Isn't he grotesque? Ha, ha, ha!' And the ludicrousness of old Nelson's inanely fierce round eyes in association with his conciliatory manner to the lieutenant presenting itself to my mind brought on another fit.

'He looks,' I spluttered, 'he looks—ha, ha, ha!—amongst you three . . . like an unhappy black-beetle. Ha, ha, ha!'

She gave out another ringing peal, ran off into her own room, and slammed the door behind her, leaving me profoundly astounded. I stopped laughing at once.

'What's the joke?' asked old Nelson's voice, half-way down the steps. He came up, sat down, and blew out his cheeks, looking inexpressibly fatuous. But I didn't want to laugh any more. And what on earth, I asked myself, have we been laughing at in this uncontrollable fashion? I felt suddenly depressed.

Oh yes. Freya had started it. The girl's overwrought, I thought. And really one couldn't wonder at it.

I had no answer to old Nelson's question, but he was too aggrieved at Jasper's visit to think of anything else. He as good as asked me whether I wouldn't undertake to hint to Jasper that he was not wanted at the Seven Isles group. I declared that it was not necessary. From

certain circumstances which had come to my knowledge lately, I had reason to think that he would not be much troubled by Jasper Allen in the future.

He emitted an earnest 'Thank God!' which nearly set me laughing again, but he did not brighten up proportionately. It seemed Heemskirk had taken special pains to make himself disagreeable. The lieutenant had frightened old Nelson very much by expressing a sinister wonder at the Government permitting a white man to settle down in that part at all. 'It is against our declared policy,' he had remarked. He had also charged him with being in reality no better than an Englishman. He had even tried to pick a quarrel with him for not learning to speak Dutch.

'I told him I was too old to learn now,' sighed out old Nelson (or Nielsen) dismally. 'He said I ought to have learned Dutch long before. I had been making my living in Dutch dependencies. It was disgraceful of me not to speak Dutch, he said. He was as savage with me as if I had been a Chinaman.'

It was plain he had been viciously badgered. He did not mention how many bottles of his best claret he had offered up on the altar of conciliation. It must have been a generous libation. But old Nelson (or Nielsen) was really hospitable. He didn't mind that; and I only regretted that this virtue should be lavished on the lieutenant-commander of the *Neptun*. I longed to tell him that in all probability he would be relieved from Heemskirk's visitations also. I did not do so only from the fear (absurd, I admit) of arousing some sort of suspicion in his mind. As if with this guileless comedy father such a thing were possible!

Strangely enough, the last words on the subject of Heemskirk were spoken by Freya, and in that very sense. The lieutenant was turning up persistently in old Nelson's conversation at dinner. At last I muttered a half audible, 'Damn the lieutenant!' I could see that the girl was getting exasperated too.

'And he wasn't well at all—was he, Freya?' old Nelson went on moaning. 'Perhaps it was that which made him so snappish, hey, Freya? He looked very bad when he left us so suddenly. His liver must be in a bad state too.'

'Oh, he will end by getting over it,' said Freya impatiently. 'And do leave off worrying about him, papa. Very likely you won't see much of him for a long time to come.'

The look she gave me in exchange for my discreet smile had no hidden mirth in it. Her eyes seemed hollowed, her face gone wan in a couple of hours. We had been laughing too much. Overwrought! Overwrought by the approach of the decisive moment. After all, sincere, courageous, and self-reliant as she was, she must have felt both the passion and the compunction of her resolve. The very strength of love which had carried her up to that point must have put her under a great moral strain, in which there might have been a little simple remorse too. For she was honest—and there, across the table, sat poor old Nelson (or Nielsen) staring at her, round-eyed and so pathetically comic in his fierce aspect as to touch the most lightsome heart.

He retired early to his room to soothe himself for a night's rest by perusing his account-books. We two remained on the verandah for another hour or so, but we exchanged only languid phrases on things without importance, as though we had been emotionally jaded by our long day's talk on the only momentous subject. And yet there was something she might have told a friend. But she didn't. We parted silently. She distrusted my masculine lack of common sense, perhaps

... Oh, Freya!

Going down the precipitous path to the landing-stage, I was confronted in the shadows of boulders and bushes by a draped feminine figure whose appearance startled me at first. It glided into my way suddenly from behind a piece of rock. But in a moment it occurred to me that it could be no one else but Freya's maid, a half-caste Malacca Portuguese. One caught fleeting glimpses of her olive face and dazzling white teeth about the house. I had also observed her at times from a distance, as she sat within call under the shade of some fruit-trees. brushing and plaiting her long raven locks. It seemed to be the principal occupation of her leisure hours. We had often exchanged nods and smiles—and a few words too. She was a pretty creature. And once I had watched her approvingly make funny and expressive grimaces behind Heemskirk's back. I understood (from Jasper) that she was in the secret, like a comedy camerista. She was to accompany Freya on her irregular way to matrimony and 'ever after' happiness. Why should she be roaming by night near the cove—unless on some love-affair of her own? I asked myself. But there was nobody suitable within the Seven Isles group, as far as I knew. It flashed upon me that it was myself she had been lying in wait for.

She hesitated, muffled from head to foot, shadowy and bashful. I advanced another pace, and how I felt is nobody's business.

'What is it?' I asked, very low.

'Nobody knows I am here,' she whispered.

'And nobody can see us,' I whispered back.

The murmur of words 'I've been so frightened' reached me. Just then, forty feet above our heads, from the yet lighted verandah, unexpected and startling, Freya's voice rang out in a clear, imperious call:

'Antonia!'

With a stifled exclamation, the hesitating girl vanished out of the path. A bush near by rustled; then silence. I waited, wondering. The lights on the verandah went out. I waited awhile longer, then continued down the path to my boat, wondering more than ever.

I remember the occurrences of that visit especially, because this was the last time I saw the Nelson bungalow. On arriving at the Straits I found cable messages which made it necessary for me to throw up my employment at a moment's notice and go home at once. I had a desperate scramble to catch the mail-boat which was due to leave next day, but I found time to write two short notes—one to Freya, the other to Jasper. Later on I wrote at length, this time to Allen alone. I got no answer. I hunted up then his brother, or, rather, half-brother, a solicitor in the city, a sallow, calm little man who looked at me over his spectacles thoughtfully.

Jasper was the only child of his father's second marriage, a transaction which had failed to commend itself to the first, grown-up family.

'You haven't heard for ages,' I repeated, with secret annoyance. 'May I ask what "for ages" means in this connection?'

'It means that I don't care whether I ever hear from him or not,' retorted the little man of law, turning nasty suddenly.

I could not blame Jasper for not wasting his time in correspondence with such an outrageous relative. But why didn't he write to me—a decent sort of friend, after all; enough of a friend to find for his silence the excuse of forgetfulness natural to a state of transcendental bliss? I waited indulgently, but nothing ever came. And the East seemed to drop out of my life without an echo, like a stone falling into a well of prodigious depth.



I suppose praiseworthy motives are a sufficient justification almost for anything. What could be more commendable in the abstract than a girl's determination that 'poor papa' should not be worried, and her anxiety that the man of her choice should be kept by any means from every occasion of doing something rash, something which might endanger the whole scheme of their happiness?

Nothing could be more tender and more prudent. We must also remember the girl's self-reliant temperament, and the general unwillingness of women—I mean women of sense—to make a fuss over

matters of that sort.

As has been said already, Heemskirk turned up some time after Jasper's arrival at Nelson's Cove. The sight of the brig lying right under the bungalow was very offensive to him. He did not fly ashore before his anchor touched the ground as Jasper used to do. On the contrary, he hung about his quarterdeck mumbling to himself; and when he ordered his boat to be manned it was in an angry voice. Freya's existence, which lifted Jasper out of himself into a blissful elation, was for Heemskirk a cause of secret torment, of hours of exasperated brooding.

While passing the brig he hailed her harshly and asked if the master was on board. Schultz, smart and neat in a spotless white suit, leaned over the taffrail, finding the question somewhat amusing. He looked humorously down into Heemskirk's boat, and answered, in the most amiable modulations of his beautiful voice, 'Captain Allen is up at the house, sir.' But his expression changed suddenly at the savage growl, 'What the devil are you grinning at?' which acknowledged that information.

He watched Heemskirk land and, instead of going to the house,

stride away by another path into the grounds.

The desire-tormented Dutchman found old Nelson (or Nielsen) at his drying-sheds, very busy superintending the manipulation of his tobacco crop, which, though small, was of excellent quality, and enjoying himself thoroughly. But Heemskirk soon put a stop to this simple happiness. He sat down by the old chap, and by the sort of talk which he knew was best calculated for the purpose, reduced him before long to a state of concealed and perspiring nervousness. It was a horrid talk

of 'authorities', and old Nelson tried to defend himself. If he dealt with English traders it was because he had to dispose of his produce somehow. He was as conciliatory as he knew how to be, and this very thing seemed to excite Heemskirk, who had worked himself up into a heavily breathing state of passion.

'And the worst of them all is that Allen,' he growled. 'Your particular friend—eh? You have let in a lot of these Englishmen into this part. You ought never to have been allowed to settle here. Never. What's he

doing here now?'

Old Nelson (or Nielsen), becoming very agitated, declared that Jasper Allen was no particular friend of his. No friend at all—at all. He had bought three tons of rice from him to feed his workpeople on. What sort of evidence of friendship was that? Heemskirk burst out at last with the thought that had been gnawing at his vitals:

'Yes. Sell three tons of rice and flirt three days with that girl of yours. I am speaking to you as a friend, Nielsen. This won't do. You are only

on sufferance here.'

Old Nelson was taken aback at first, but recovered pretty quickly. Won't do! Certainly! Of course, it wouldn't do! The last man in the world. But his girl didn't care for the fellow, and was too sensible to fall in love with anyone. He was very earnest in impressing on Heemskirk his own feeling of absolute security. And the lieutenant, casting doubting glances sideways, was yet willing to believe him.

'Much you know about it,' he grunted nevertheless.

'But I do know,' insisted old Nelson, with the greater desperation because he wanted to resist the doubts arising in his own mind. 'My own daughter! In my own house, and I not to know! Come! It would be a good joke, Lieutenant.'

'They seem to be carrying on considerably,' remarked Heemskirk moodily. 'I suppose they are together now,' he added, feeling a pang which changed what he meant for a mocking smile into a strange

grimace.

The harassed Nelson shook his hand at him. He was at bottom shocked at this insistence, and was even beginning to feel annoyed at the absurdity of it.

'Pooh! Pooh! I'll tell you what, Lieutenant: you go to the house and have a drop of gin-and-bitters before dinner. Ask for Freya. I must see the last of this tobacco put away for the night, but I'll be along presently.'

Heemskirk was not insensible to this suggestion. It answered to his secret longing, which was not a longing for drink, however. Old Nelson shouted solicitously after his broad back a recommendation to make himself comfortable, and that there was a box of cheroots on the verandah.

It was the west verandah that old Nelson meant, the one which was the living-room of the house, and had split-rattan screens of the very finest quality. The east verandah, sacred to his own privacy, puffing out of cheeks, and other signs of perplexed thinking, was fitted with stout blinds of sailcloth. The north verandah was not a verandah at all, really. It was more like a long balcony. It did not communicate with the other two, and could only be approached by a passage inside the house. Thus it had a privacy which made it a convenient place for a maiden's meditations without words, and also for the discourses, apparently without sense, which, passing between a young man and a maid, become pregnant with a diversity of transcendental meanings.

This north verandah was embowered with climbing plants. Freya, whose room opened out on it, had furnished it as a sort of boudoir for herself, with a few cane chairs and a sofa of the same kind. On this sofa she and Jasper sat as close together as is possible in this imperfect world where neither can a body be in two places at once nor yet two bodies can be in one place at the same time. They had been sitting together all the afternoon, and I won't say that their talk had been without sense. Loving him with a little judicious anxiety lest in his elation he should break his heart over some mishap, Freya naturally would talk to him soberly. He, nervous and brusque when away from her, appeared always as if overcome by her visibility, by the great wonder of being palpably loved. An old man's child, having lost his mother early, thrown out to sea out of the way while very young, he had not much experience of tenderness of any kind.

In this private, foliage-embowered verandah, and at this late hour of the afternoon, he bent down a little, and, possessing himself of Freya's hands, was kissing them one after another, while she smiled and looked down at his head with the eyes of approving compassion. At that same moment Heemskirk was approaching the house from the north.

Antonia was on the watch on that side. But she did not keep a very good watch. The sun was setting; she knew that her young mistress and the captain of the *Bonito* were about to separate. She was walking to and

fro in the dusky grove with a flower in her hair, and singing softly to herself, when suddenly, within a foot of her, the lieutenant appeared from behind a tree. She bounded aside like a startled fawn, but Heemskirk, with a lucid comprehension of what she was there for, pounced upon her, and, catching her arm, clapped his other thick hand over her mouth.

'If you try to make a noise I'll twist your neck!'

This ferocious figure of speech terrified the girl sufficiently. Heemskirk had seen plainly enough on the verandah Freya's golden head with another head very close to it. He dragged the unresisting maid with him by a circuitous way into the compound, where he dismissed her with a vicious push in the direction of the cluster of bamboo huts for the servants.

She was very much like the faithful *camerista* of Italian comedy, but in her terror she bolted away without a sound from that thick, short, black-eyed man with a cruel grip of fingers like a vice. Quaking all over at a distance, extremely scared and half inclined to laugh, she saw him enter the house at the back.

The interior of the bungalow was divided by two passages crossing each other in the middle. At that point Heemskirk, by turning his head slightly to the left as he passed, secured the evidence of 'carrying on' so irreconcilable with old Nelson's assurances that it made him stagger, with a rush of blood to his head. Two white figures, distinct against the light, stood in an unmistakable attitude. Freya's arms were round Jasper's neck. Their faces were characteristically superimposed on each other, and Heemskirk went on, his throat choked with a sudden rising of curses, till on the west verandah he stumbled blindly against a chair and then dropped into another as though his legs had been swept from under him. He had indulged too long in the habit of appropriating Freya to himself in his thoughts. 'Is that how you entertain your visitors—you . . .' he thought, so outraged that he could not find a sufficiently degrading epithet.

Freya struggled a little and threw her head back.

'Somebody has come in,' she whispered. Jasper, holding her clasped closely to his breast, and looking down into her face, suggested casually:

'Your father.'

Freya tried to disengage herself, but she had not the heart absolutely to push him away with her hands.

'I believe it's Heemskirk,' she breathed out at him.

He, plunging into her eyes in a quiet rapture, was provoked to a

vague smile by the sound of the name.

'The ass is always knocking down my beacons outside the river,' he murmured. He attached no other meaning to Heemskirk's existence; but Freya was asking herself whether the lieutenant had seen them.

'Let me go, kid,' she ordered in a peremptory whisper. Jasper obeyed, and, stepping back at once, continued his contemplation of her face under another angle. 'I must go and see,' she said to herself anxiously.

She instructed him hurriedly to wait a moment after she was gone and then to slip on to the back verandah and get a quiet smoke before

he showed himself.

'Don't stay late this evening,' was her last recommendation before she left him.

Then Freya came out on the west verandah with her light, rapid step. While going through the doorway she managed to shake down the folds of the looped-up curtains at the end of the passage so as to cover Jasper's retreat from the bower. Directly she appeared Heemskirk jumped up as if to fly at her. She paused, and he made her an exaggerated low bow.

It irritated Freya.

'Oh! It's you, Mr Heemskirk. How do you do?'

She spoke in her usual tone. Her face was not plainly visible to him in the dusk of the deep verandah. He dared not trust himself to speak, his rage at what he had seen was so great. And when she added with serenity, 'Papa will be coming in before long,' he called her horrid names silently, to himself, before he spoke with contorted lips.

'I have seen your father already. We had a talk in the sheds. He told

me some very interesting things. Oh, very-'

Freya sat down. She thought: 'He has seen us, for certain.' She was not ashamed. What she was afraid of was some foolish or awkward complication. But she could not conceive how much her person had been appropriated by Heemskirk (in his thoughts). She tried to be conversational.

'You are coming now from Palembang, I suppose?'

'Eh? What? Oh yes! I come from Palembang. Ha, ha, ha! You know what your father said? He said he was afraid you were having a very dull time of it here.'

'And I suppose you are going to cruise in the Moluccas?' continued Freya, who wanted to impart some useful information to Jasper if possible. At the same time she was always glad to know that those two men were a few hundred miles apart when not under her eye.

Heemskirk growled angrily.

'Yes. Moluccas,' glaring in the direction of her shadowy figure. 'Your father thinks it's very quiet for you here. I tell you what, Miss Freya. There isn't such a quiet spot on earth that a woman can't find an

opportunity of making a fool of somebody.'

Freya thought: 'I mustn't let him provoke me.' Presently the Tamil boy, who was Nelson's head servant, came in with the lights. She addressed him at once with voluble directions where to put the lamps, told him to bring the tray with the gin-and-bitters, and to send Antonia into the house.

'I will have to leave you to yourself, Mr Heemskirk, for a while,' she said.

And she went to her room to put on another frock. She made a quick change of it because she wished to be on the verandah before her father and the lieutenant met again. She relied on herself to regulate that evening's intercourse between these two. But Antonia, still scared and hysterical, exhibited a bruise on her arm which roused Freya's indignation.

'He jumped on me out of the bush like a tiger,' said the girl, laughing

nervously with frightened eyes.

'The brute!' thought Freya. 'He meant to spy on us, then.' She was enraged, but the recollection of the thick Dutchman in white trousers wide at the hips and narrow at the ankles, with his shoulder-straps and black bullet-head, glaring at her in the light of the lamps, was so repulsively comical that she could not help a smiling grimace. Then she became anxious. The absurdities of three men were forcing this anxiety upon her: Jasper's impetuosity, her father's fears, Heemskirk's infatuation. She was very tender to the first two, and she made up her mind to display all her feminine diplomacy. All this, she said to herself, will be over and done with before very long now.

Heemskirk on the verandah, lolling in a chair, his legs extended and his white cap reposing on his stomach, was lashing himself into a fury of an atrocious character altogether incomprehensible to a girl like Freya. His chin was resting on his chest, his eyes gazed stonily at his shoes. Freya examined him from behind the curtain. He didn't stir. He was ridiculous. But this absolute stillness was impressive. She stole back along the passage to the east verandah, where Jasper was sitting quietly in the dark, doing what he was told, like a good boy.

'Psst,' she hissed. He was by her side in a moment.

'Yes. What is it?' he murmured.

'It's that beetle,' she whispered uneasily. Under the impression of Heemskirk's sinister immobility she had half a mind to let Jasper know that they had been seen. But she was by no means certain that Heemskirk would tell her father—and at any rate not that evening. She concluded rapidly that the safest thing would be to get Jasper out of the way as soon as possible.

'What has he been doing?' asked Jasper in a calm undertone.

'Oh, nothing! Nothing. He sits there looking cross. But you know how he's always worrying papa.'

'Your father's quite unreasonable,' pronounced Jasper judicially.

'I don't know,' she said in a doubtful tone. Something of old Nelson's dread of the authorities had rubbed off on the girl since she had to live with it day after day. 'I don't know. Papa's afraid of being reduced to beggary, as he says, in his old days. Look here, kid, you had better clear out tomorrow, first thing.'

Jasper had hoped for another afternoon with Freya, an afternoon of quiet felicity with the girl by his side and his eyes on his brig, anticipating a blissful future. His silence was eloquent with disappointment, and Freya understood it very well. She, too, was disappointed. But it was her business to be sensible.

'We shan't have a moment to ourselves with that beetle creeping round the house,' she argued in a low, hurried voice. 'So what's the good of your staying? And he won't go while the brig's here. You know he won't.'

'He ought to be reported for loitering,' murmured Jasper, with a vexed little laugh.

'Mind you get under way at daylight,' recommended Freya under her breath.

He detained her after the manner of lovers. She expostulated without struggling because it was hard for her to repulse him. He whispered into her ear while he put his arms round her:

'Next time we two meet, next time I hold you like this, it shall be on

board. You and I, in the brig—all the world, all the life——' And then he flashed out, 'I wonder I can wait! I feel as if I must carry you off now, at once. I could run with you in my hands—down the path—without stumbling—without touching the earth——'

She was still. She listened to the passion in his voice. She was saying to herself that if she were to whisper the faintest yes, if she were but to sigh lightly her consent, he would do it. He was capable of doing it—without touching the earth. She closed her eyes and smiled in the dark, abandoning herself in a delightful giddiness, for an instant, to his encircling arm. But before he could be tempted to tighten his grasp she was out of it, a foot away from him and in full possession of herself.

That was the steady Freya. She was touched by the deep sigh which floated up to her from the white figure of Jasper, who did not stir.

'You are a mad kid,' she said tremulously. Then with a change of tone, 'No one could carry me off. Not even you. I am not the sort of girl that gets carried off.' His white form seemed to shrink a little before the force of that assertion, and she relented. 'Isn't it enough for you to know that you have—that you have carried me away?' she added in a tender tone.

He murmured an endearing word, and she continued:

'I've promised you—I've said I would come—and I shall come of my own free will. You shall wait for me on board. I shall get up the side—by myself, and walk up to you on the deck and say, "Here I am, kid." And then—and then I shall be carried off. But it will be no man who will carry me off—it will be the brig, your brig, our brig . . . I love the beauty!'

She heard an inarticulate sound, something like a moan wrung out by pain or delight, and glided away. There was that other man on the other verandah, that dark, surly Dutchman, who could make trouble between Jasper and her father, bring about a quarrel, ugly words, and perhaps a physical collision. What a horrible situation! But, even putting aside that awful extremity, she shrank from having to live for some three months with a wretched, tormented, angry, distracted, absurd man. And when the day came, the day and the hour, what should she do if her father tried to detain her by main force—as was, after all, possible? Could she actually struggle with him hand to hand? But it was of lamentations and entreaties that she was really afraid. Could she withstand them? What an odious, cruel, ridiculous position would that be!

'But it won't be. He'll say nothing,' she thought as she came out quickly on the west verandah, and, seeing that Heemskirk did not move, sat down on a chair near the doorway and kept her eyes on him. The outraged lieutenant had not changed his attitude; only his cap had fallen off his stomach and was lying on the floor. His thick black eyebrows were knitted by a frown, while he looked at her out of the corners of his eyes. And their sideways glance in conjunction with the hooked nose, the whole bulky, ungainly, sprawling person, struck Freya as so comically moody that, inwardly discomposed as she was, she could not help smiling. She did her best to give that smile a conciliatory character. She did not want to provoke Heemskirk needlessly.

And the lieutenant, perceiving that smile, was mollified. It never entered his head that his outward appearance, a naval officer, in uniform, could appear ridiculous to that girl of no position—the daughter of old Nielsen. The recollection of her arms round Jasper's neck still irritated and excited him. 'The hussy!' he thought. 'Smiling-eh? That's how you are amusing yourself. Fooling your father finely, aren't you? You have a taste for that sort of fun—have you? Well, we shall see——' He did not alter his position, but on his pursed-up lips there also appeared a smile of surly and ill-omened amusement, while his eyes returned to the contemplation of his boots.

Freya felt hot with indignation. She sat radiantly fair in the lamplight, her strong, well-shaped hands lying one on top of the other in her lap ... 'Odious creature,' she thought. Her face coloured with sudden anger. 'You have scared my maid out of her senses,' she said aloud. 'What possessed you?'

He was thinking so deeply of her that the sound of her voice, pronouncing these unexpected words, startled him extremely. He jerked up his head and looked so bewildered that Freya insisted impatiently:

'I mean Antonia. You have bruised her arm. What did you do it for?' 'Do you want to quarrel with me?' he asked thickly, with a sort

of amazement. He blinked like an owl. He was funny. Freya, like all women, had a keen sense of the ridiculous in outward appearance.

'Well, no; I don't think I do.' She could not help herself. She laughed outright, a clear, nervous laugh, in which Heemskirk joined suddenly with a harsh 'Ha, ha, ha!'

Voices and footsteps were heard in the passage, and Jasper, with old Nelson, came out. Old Nelson looked at his daughter approvingly, for he liked the lieutenant to be kept in good humour. And he also joined sympathetically in the laugh. 'Now, Lieutenant, we shall have some dinner,' he said, rubbing his hands cheerily. Jasper had gone straight to the balustrade. The sky was full of stars, and in the blue velvety night the cove below had a denser blackness, in which the riding-lights of the brig and of the gunboat glimmered redly, like suspended sparks. 'Next time this riding-light glimmers down there, I'll be waiting for her on the quarterdeck to come and say "Here I am," 'Jasper thought; and his heart seemed to grow bigger in his chest, dilated by an oppressive happiness that nearly wrung out a cry from him. There was no wind. Not a leaf below him stirred, and even the sea was but a still, uncomplaining shadow. Far away on the unclouded sky the pale lightning, the heat-lightning of the tropics, played tremulously amongst the low stars in short, faint, mysteriously consecutive flashes, like incomprehensible signals from some distant planet.

The dinner passed off quietly. Freya sat facing her father, calm but pale. Heemskirk affected to talk only to old Nelson. Jasper's behaviour was exemplary. He kept his eyes under control, basking in the sense of Freya's nearness, as people bask in the sun without looking up to heaven. And very soon after dinner was over, mindful of his instructions, he declared that it was time for him to go on board his ship.

Heemskirk did not look up. Ensconced in the rocking-chair, and puffing at a cheroot, he had the air of meditating surlily over some odious outbreak. So at least it seemed to Freya. Old Nelson said at once, 'I'll stroll down with you.' He had begun a professional conversation about the dangers of the New Guinea coast, and wanted to relate to Jasper some experience of his own 'over there'. Jasper was such a good listener! Freya made as if to accompany them, but her father frowned, shook his head, and nodded significantly towards the immovable Heemskirk blowing out smoke with half-closed eyes and protruded lips. The lieutenant must not be left alone. Take offence, perhaps.

Freya obeyed these signs. 'Perhaps it is better for me to stay,' she thought. Women are not generally prone to review their own conduct, still less to condemn it. The embarrassing masculine absurdities are in the main responsible for its ethics. But, looking at Heemskirk, Freya felt regret and even remorse. His thick bulk in repose suggested the idea of repletion, but as a matter of fact he had eaten very little. He had drunk a great deal, however. The fleshy lobes of his unpleasant big ears

with deeply folded rims were crimson. They quite flamed in the neighbourhood of the flat, sallow cheeks. For a considerable time he did not raise his heavy brown eyelids. To be at the mercy of such a creature was humiliating; and Freya, who always ended by being frank with herself, thought regretfully, 'If only I had been open with papa from the first! But then what an impossible life he would have led me!' Yes. Men were absurd in many ways: lovably like Jasper, impracticably like her father, odiously like that grotesquely supine creature in the chair. Was it possible to talk him over? Perhaps it was not necessary. 'Oh! I can't talk to him,' she thought. And when Heemskirk, still without looking at her, began resolutely to crush his half-smoked cheroot on the coffee-tray, she took alarm, glided towards the piano, opened it in tremendous haste, and struck the keys before she sat down.

In an instant the verandah, the whole carpetless wooden bungalow raised on piles, became filled with an uproarious, confused resonance. But through it all she heard, she felt on the floor the heavy, prowling footsteps of the lieutenant moving to and fro at her back. He was not exactly drunk, but he was sufficiently primed to make the suggestions of his excited imagination seem perfectly feasible and even clever; beautifully, unscrupulously clever. Freya, aware that he had stopped just behind her, went on playing without turning her head. She played with spirit, brilliantly, a fierce piece of music, but when his voice reached her she went cold all over. It was the voice, not the words. The insolent familiarity of tone dismayed her to such an extent that she could not understand at first what he was saying. His utterance was thick too.

'I suspected... Of course I suspected something of your little goings-on. I am not a child. But from suspecting to seeing—seeing, you understand—there's an enormous difference. That sort of thing ... Come! One isn't made of stone. And when a man has been worried by a girl as I have been worried by you, Miss Freya—sleeping and waking, then, of course ... But I am a man of the world. It must be dull for you here ... I say, won't you leave off this confounded playing ...?'

This last was the only sentence really which she made out. She shook her head negatively, and in desperation put on the loud pedal, but she could not make the sound of the piano cover his raised voice.

'Only, I am surprised that you should . . . An English trading skipper, a common fellow. Low, cheeky lot, infesting these islands. I would

make short work of such trash! While you have here a good friend, a gentleman ready to worship at your feet—your pretty feet—an officer, a man of family. Strange, isn't it? But what of that! You are fit for a prince.'

Freya did not turn her head. Her face went stiff with horror and indignation. This adventure was altogether beyond her conception of what was possible. It was not in her character to jump up and run away. It seemed to her, too, that if she did move there was no saying what might happen. Presently her father would be back, and then the other would have to leave off. It was best to ignore—to ignore. She went on playing loudly and correctly, as though she were alone, as if Heemskirk did not exist. That proceeding irritated him.

'Come! You may deceive your father,' he bawled angrily, 'but I am not to be made a fool of! Stop this infernal noise... Freya... Hey! You Scandinavian Goddess of Love! Stop! Do you hear? That's what you are—of love. But the heathen gods are only devils in disguise, and that's what you are too—a deep little devil. Stop it, I say, or I will lift you off that stoo!!'

Standing behind her, he devoured her with his eyes, from the golden crown of her rigidly motionless head to the heels of her shoes, the line of her shapely shoulders, the curves of her fine figure swaying a little before the keyboard. She had on a light dress; the sleeves stopped short at the elbows in an edging of lace. A satin ribbon encircled her waist. In an access of irresistible, reckless hopefulness he clapped both his hands on that waist—and then the irritating music stopped at last. But, quick as she was in springing away from the contact (the round music-stool going over with a crash), Heemskirk's lips, aiming at her neck, landed a hungry, smacking kiss just under her ear. A deep silence reigned for a time. And then he laughed rather feebly.

He was disconcerted somewhat by her white, still face, the big light-violet eyes resting on him stonily. She had not uttered a sound. She faced him, steadying herself on the corner of the piano with one extended hand. The other went on rubbing with mechanical persistency the place his lips had touched.

'What's the trouble?' he said, offended. 'Startled you? Look here: don't let us have any of that nonsense. You don't mean to say a kiss frightens you so much as all that . . . I know better . . . I don't mean to be left out in the cold.'

He had been gazing into her face with such strained intentness that he could no longer see it distinctly. Everything round him was rather misty. He forgot the overturned stool, caught his foot against it, and lurched forward slightly, saying in an ingratiating tone:

'I'm not bad fun, really. You try a few kisses to begin with---'

He said no more, because his head received a terrific concussion, accompanied by an explosive sound. Freya had swung her round, strong arm with such force that the impact of her open palm on his flat cheek turned him half round. Uttering a faint, hoarse yell, the lieutenant clapped both his hands to the left side of his face, which had taken on suddenly a dusky brick-red tinge. Freya, very erect, her violet eyes darkened, her palm still tingling from the blow, a sort of restrained determined smile showing a tiny gleam of her white teeth, heard her father's rapid, heavy tread on the path below the verandah. Her expression lost its pugnacity and became sincerely concerned. She was sorry for her father. She stooped quickly to pick up the music-stool, as if anxious to obliterate the traces . . . But that was no good. She had resumed her attitude, one hand resting lightly on the piano, before old Nelson got up to the top of the stairs.

Poor father! How furious he will be—how upset! And afterwards, what tremors, what unhappiness! Why had she not been open with him from the first? His round, innocent stare of amazement cut her to the quick. But he was not looking at her. His stare was directed to Heemskirk, who, with his back to him and with his hands still up to his face, was hissing curses through his teeth, and (she saw him in profile) glaring at her balefully with one black, evil eye.

'What's the matter?' asked old Nelson, very much bewildered.

She did not answer him. She thought of Jasper on the deck of the brig, gazing up at the lighted bungalow, and she felt frightened. It was a mercy that one of them at least was on board out of the way. She only wished he were a hundred miles off. And yet she was not certain that she did. Had Jasper been mysteriously moved that moment to reappear on the verandah she would have thrown her consistency, her firmness, her self-possession, to the winds, and flown into his arms.

'What is it? What is it?' insisted the unsuspecting Nelson, getting quite excited. 'Only this minute you were playing a tune, and——'

Freya, unable to speak in her apprehension of what was coming (she was also fascinated by that black, evil, glaring eye), only nodded

slightly at the lieutenant, as much as to say, 'Just look at him!'

'Why, yes!' exclaimed old Nelson. 'I see. What on earth---'

Meantime he had cautiously approached Heemskirk, who, bursting into incoherent imprecations, was stamping with both feet where he stood. The indignity of the blow, the rage of baffled purpose, the ridicule of the exposure, and the impossibility of revenge maddened him to a point when he simply felt he must howl with fury.

'Oh, oh, oh!' he howled, stamping across the verandah as though he

meant to drive his foot through the floor at every step.

'Why, is his face hurt?' asked the astounded old Nelson. The truth dawned suddenly upon his innocent mind. 'Dear me!' he cried, enlightened. 'Get some brandy, quick, Freya... You are subject to it, Lieutenant? Fiendish, eh? I know, I know! Used to go crazy all of a sudden myself in the time... And the little bottle of laudanum from the medicine-chest, too, Freya. Look sharp... Don't you see he's got a toothache?'

And, indeed, what other explanation could have presented itself to the guileless old Nelson, beholding this cheek nursed with both hands, these wild glances, these stampings, this distracted swaying of the body? It would have demanded a preternatural acuteness to hit upon the true cause. Freya had not moved. She watched Heemskirk's savagely enquiring, black stare directed stealthily upon herself. 'Aha, you would like to be let off!' she said to herself. She looked at him unflinchingly, thinking it out. The temptation of making an end of it all without further trouble was irresistible. She gave an almost imperceptible nod of assent, and glided away.

'Hurry up that brandy!' old Nelson shouted, as she disappeared in

the passage.

Heemskirk relieved his deeper feelings by a sudden string of curses in Dutch and English which he sent after her. He raved to his heart's content, flinging to and fro the verandah and kicking chairs out of his way; while Nelson (or Nielsen), whose sympathy was profoundly stirred by these evidences of agonising pain, hovered round his dear (and dreaded) lieutenant, fussing like an old hen.

'Dear me, dear me! Is it so bad? I know well what it is. I used to frighten my poor wife sometimes. Do you get it often like this, Lieu-

tenant?'

Heemskirk shouldered him viciously out of his way, with a short,

insane laugh. But his staggering host took it in good part; a man beside himself with excruciating toothache is not responsible.

'Go into my room, Lieutenant,' he suggested urgently. 'Throw your-

self on my bed. We will get something to ease you in a minute.'

He seized the poor sufferer by the arm and forced him gently onwards to the very bed, on which Heemskirk, in a renewed access of rage, flung himself down with such force that he rebounded from the mattress to the height of quite a foot.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the scared Nelson, and incontinently ran off to hurry up the brandy and the laudanum, very angry that so little alacrity was shown in relieving the tortures of his precious guest. In the end he

got these things himself.

Half an hour later he stood in the inner passage of the house, surprised by faint, spasmodic sounds of a mysterious nature, between laughter and sobs. He frowned; then went straight towards his daughter's room and knocked at the door.

Freya, her glorious fair hair framing her white face and rippling

down a dark-blue dressing-gown, opened it partly.

The light in the room was dim. Antonia, crouching in a corner, rocked herself backwards and forwards, uttering feeble moans. Old Nelson had not much experience in various kinds of feminine laughter, but he was certain there had been laughter there.

'Very unfeeling, very unfeeling!' he said, with weighty displeasure. 'What is there so amusing in a man being in pain? I should have

thought a woman—a young girl——'

'He was so funny,' murmured Freya, whose eyes glistened strangely in the semi-obscurity of the passage. 'And then, you know, I don't like

him,' she added in an unsteady voice.

'Funny!' repeated old Nelson, amazed at this evidence of callousness in one so young. 'You don't like him! Do you mean to say that, because you don't like him, you—— Why, it's simply cruel! Don't you know it's about the worst sort of pain there is? Dogs have been known to go mad with it.'

'He certainly seemed to have gone mad,' Freya said with an effort, as if she were struggling with some hidden feeling.

But her father was launched.

'And you know how he is. He notices everything. He is a fellow to take offence for the least little thing—regular Dutchman—and I want

to keep friendly with him. It's like this, my girl: if that Rajah of ours were to do something silly—and you know he is a sulky, rebellious beggar—and the authorities took into their heads that my influence over him wasn't good, you would find yourself without a roof over your head——'

She cried, 'What nonsense, father!' in a not very assured tone, and discovered that he was angry, angry enough to achieve irony; yes, old

Nelson (or Nielsen), irony! Just a gleam of it.

'Oh, of course, if you have means of your own—a mansion, a plantation that I know nothing of——'But he was not capable of sustained irony. 'I tell you they would bundle me out of here,' he whispered forcibly; 'without compensation, of course. I know these Dutch. And the lieutenant's just the fellow to start the trouble going. He has the ear of influential officials. I wouldn't offend him for anything—for anything—on no consideration whatever... What did you say?'

It was only an inarticulate exclamation. If she ever had a half-formed intention of telling him everything she had given it up now. It was impossible, both out of regard for his dignity and for the peace of his

poor mind.

'I don't care for him myself very much,' old Nelson's subdued undertone confessed in a sigh. 'He's easier now,' he went on, after a silence. 'I've given him up my bed for the night. I shall sleep on my verandah, in the hammock. No; I can't say I like him either, but from that to laugh at a man because he's driven crazy with pain is a long way. You've surprised me, Freya. That side of his face is quite flushed.'

Her shoulders shook convulsively under his hands, which he laid on her paternally. His straggly, wiry moustache brushed her forehead in a goodnight kiss. She closed the door, and went away from it to the middle of the room before she allowed herself a tired-out sort of laugh, without buoyancy.

'Flushed! A little flushed!' she repeated to herself. 'I hope so, indeed!

A little---'

Her eyelashes were wet. Antonia, in her corner, moaned and giggled, and it was impossible to tell where the moans ended and the giggles began.

The mistress and the maid had been somewhat hysterical, for Freya, on fleeing into her room, had found Antonia there, and had told her

everything.

'I have avenged you, my girl,' she exclaimed.

And then they had laughingly cried and cryingly laughed with admonitions—'Ssh, not so loud! Be quiet!' on one part, and interludes of

'I am so frightened . . . He's an evil man,' on the other.

Antonia was very much afraid of Heemskirk. She was afraid of him because of his personal appearance: because of his eyes and his eyebrows, and his mouth and his nose and his limbs. Nothing could be more rational. And she thought him an evil man, because, to her eyes, he looked evil. No ground for an opinion could be sounder. In the dimness of the room, with only a night-light burning at the head of Freya's bed, the *camerista* crept out of her corner to crouch at the feet of her mistress, supplicating in whispers:

'There's the brig. Captain Allen. Let us run away at once-oh, let us

run away! I am so frightened. Let us! Let us!'

'I! Run away!' thought Freya to herself, without looking down at the

scared girl. 'Never.'

Both the resolute mistress under the mosquito net and the fright-ened maid lying curled up on a mat at the foot of the bed did not sleep very well that night. The person that did not sleep at all was Lieutenant Heemskirk. He lay on his back staring vindictively in the darkness. Inflaming images and humiliating reflections succeeded each other in his mind, keeping up, augmenting his anger. A pretty tale this to get about! But it must not be allowed to get about. The outrage had to be swallowed in silence. A pretty affair! Fooled, led on, and struck by the girl—and probably fooled by the father too. But no. Nielsen was but another victim of that shameless hussy, that brazen minx, that sly, laughing, kissing, lying . . .

'No; he did not deceive me on purpose,' thought the tormented lieutenant. 'But I should like to pay him off, all the same, for being such an

imbecile——'

Well, some day, perhaps. One thing he was firmly resolved on: he had made up his mind to steal early out of the house. He did not think he could face the girl without going out of his mind with fury.

'Fire and perdition! Ten thousand devils! I shall choke here before the morning!' he muttered to himself, lying rigid on his back on old

Nelson's bed, his breast heaving for air.

He arose at daylight and started cautiously to open the door. Faint sounds in the passage alarmed him, and remaining concealed he saw

Freya coming out. This unexpected sight deprived him of all power to move away from the crack of the door. It was the narrowest crack possible, but commanding the view of the end of the verandah. Freya made for that end hastily to watch the brig passing the point. She wore her dark dressing-gown; her feet were bare, because, having fallen asleep towards the morning, she ran out headlong in her fear of being too late. Heemskirk had never seen her looking like this, with her hair drawn back smoothly to the shape of her head, and hanging in one heavy, fair tress down her back, and with that air of extreme youth, intensity, and eagerness. And at first he was amazed, and then he gnashed his teeth. He could not face her at all. He muttered a curse, and kept still behind the door.

With a low, deep-breathed 'Ah!' when she first saw the brig already under way, she reached for Nelson's long glass reposing on brackets high up the wall. The wide sleeve of the dressing-gown slipped back, uncovering her white arm as far as the shoulder. Heemskirk, gripping the door-handle as if to crush it, felt like a man just risen to his feet from a drinking-bout.

And Freya knew that he was watching her. She knew. She had seen the door move as she came out of the passage. She was aware of his eyes being on her, with scornful bitterness, with triumphant contempt.

'You are there,' she thought, levelling the long glass. 'Oh, well, look on, then!'

The green islets appeared like black shadows, the ashen sea was smooth as glass, the clear robe of the colourless dawn, in which even the brig appeared shadowy, had a hem of light in the east. Directly Freya had made out Jasper on deck, with his own long glass directed to the bungalow, she laid hers down and raised both her beautiful white arms above her head. In that attitude of supreme cry she stood still, glowing with the consciousness of Jasper's adoration going out to her figure held in the field of his glass away there, and warmed, too, by the feeling of evil passion, the burning, covetous eyes of the other, fastened on her back. In the fervour of her love, in the caprice of her mind, and with that mysterious knowledge of masculine nature women seem to be born to, she thought:

'You are looking on—you will—you must! Then you shall see something.'

She brought both her hands to her lips, then flung them out, sending

a kiss over the sea, as if she wanted to throw her heart along with it on the deck of the brig. Her face was rosy, her eyes shone. Her repeated, passionate gesture seemed to fling kisses by the hundred again and again and again, while the slowly ascending sun brought the glory of colour to the world, turning the islets green, the sea blue, the brig below her white—dazzlingly white in the spread of her wings—with the red ensign streaming like a tiny flame from the peak. And each time she murmured with a rising inflection, 'Take this—and this—and this—' till suddenly her arms fell. She had seen the ensign dipped in response, and next moment the point below hid the hull of the brig from her view. Then she turned away from the balustrade, and, passing slowly before the door of her father's room with her eyelids lowered, and an enigmatic expression on her face, she disappeared behind the curtain.

But instead of going along the passage, she remained concealed and very still on the other side to watch what would happen. For some time the broad, furnished verandah remained empty. Then the door of old Nelson's room came open suddenly, and Heemskirk staggered out. His hair was rumpled, his eyes bloodshot, his unshaven face looked very dark. He gazed wildly about, saw his cap on a table, snatched it up, and made for the stairs quietly, but with a strange, tottering gait, like the last

effort of waning strength.

Shortly after his head had sunk below the level of the floor, Freya came out from behind the curtain, with compressed, scheming lips, and no softness at all in her luminous eyes. He could not be allowed to sneak off scot-free. Never-never! She was excited, she tingled all over, she had tasted blood! He must be made to understand that she had been aware of having been watched; he must know that he had been seen slinking off shamefully. But to run to the front rail and shout after him would have been childish, crude—undignified. And to shout what? What word? What phrase? No; it was impossible. Then how? ... She frowned, discovered it, dashed at the piano, which had stood open all night, and made the rosewood monster growl savagely in an irritated bass. She struck chords as if firing shots after that straddling, broad figure in ample white trousers and a dark uniform jacket with gold shoulder-straps, and then she pursued him with the same thing she had played the evening before—a modern, fierce piece of love-music which had been tried more than once against the thunderstorms of the group. She accentuated its rhythm with triumphant malice, so absorbed in her purpose that she did not notice the presence of her father, who, wearing an old threadbare ulster of a check pattern over his sleepingsuit, had run out from the back verandah to enquire the reason of this untimely performance. He stared at her.

'What on earth? . . . Freya!' . . . His voice was nearly drowned by the piano. 'What's become of the lieutenant?' he shouted.

She looked up at him as if her soul were lost in her music, with unseeing eyes.

'Gone.'

'Wha-a-t?...Where?'

She shook her head slightly, and went on playing louder than before. Old Nelson's innocently anxious gaze, starting from the open door of his room, explored the whole place high and low, as if the lieutenant were something small which might have been crawling on the floor or clinging to a wall. But a shrill whistle coming somewhere from below pierced the ample volume of sound rolling out of the piano in great, vibrating waves. The lieutenant was down at the cove, whistling for the boat to come and take him off to his ship. And he seemed to be in a terrific hurry, too, for he whistled again almost directly, waited for a moment, and then sent out a long, interminable, shrill call as distressful to hear as though he had shrieked without drawing breath. Freya ceased playing suddenly.

'Going on board,' said old Nelson, perturbed by the event. 'What could have made him clear out so early? Queer chap. Devilishly touchy, too! I shouldn't wonder if it was your conduct last night that hurt his feelings? I noticed you, Freya. You as well as laughed in his face, while he was suffering agonies from neuralgia. It isn't the way to get yourself

liked. He's offended with you.'

Freya's hands now reposed passive on the keys; she bowed her fair head, feeling a sudden discontent, a nervous lassitude, as though she had passed through some exhausting crisis. Old Nelson (or Nielsen), looking aggrieved, was revolving matters of policy in his bald head.

'I think it would be right for me to go on board just to enquire, sometime this morning,' he declared fussily. 'Why don't they bring me my morning tea? Do you hear, Freya? You have astonished me, I must say. I didn't think a young girl could be so unfeeling. And the lieutenant thinks himself a friend of ours too! What? No? Well, he calls himself a

friend, and that's something to a person in my position. Certainly! Oh yes, I must go on board.'

'Must you?' murmured Freya listlessly; then added, in her thought,

'Poor man!'



In respect of the next seven weeks, all that is necessary to say is, first, that old Nelson (or Nielsen) failed in paying his politic call. The *Neptun* gunboat of HM the King of the Netherlands, commanded by an outraged and infuriated lieutenant, left the cove at an unexpectedly early hour. When Freya's father came down to the shore, after seeing his precious crop of tobacco spread out properly in the sun, she was already steaming round the point. Old Nelson regretted the circumstance for many days.

'Now, I don't know in what disposition the man went away,' he lamented to his hard daughter. He was amazed at her hardness. He was

almost frightened by her indifference.

Next, it must be recorded that the same day the gunboat Neptun, steering east, passed the brig Bonito becalmed in sight of Carimata, with her head to the eastward too. Her captain, Jasper Allen, giving himself up consciously to a tender, possessive reverie of his Freya, did not get out of his long chair on the poop to look at the Neptun, which passed so close that the smoke belching out suddenly from her short black funnel rolled between the masts of the Bonito, obscuring for a moment the sunlit whiteness of her sails, consecrated to the service of love. Jasper did not even turn his head for a glance. But Heemskirk, on the bridge, had gazed long and earnestly at the brig from the distance, gripping hard the brass rail in front of him, till, the two ships closing, he lost all confidence in himself, and retreating to the chart-room, pulled the door to with a crash. There, his brows knitted, his mouth drawn on one side in sardonic meditation, he sat through many still hours—a sort of Prometheus in the bonds of unholy desire, having his very vitals torn by the beak and claws of humiliated passion.

That species of fowl is not to be shooed off as easily as a chicken. Fooled, cheated, deceived, led on, outraged, mocked at—beak and claws! A sinister bird! The lieutenant had no mind to become the talk of

the archipelago, as the naval officer who had had his face slapped by a girl. Was it possible that she really loved that rascally trader? He tried not to think, but, worse than thoughts, definite impressions beset him in his retreat. He saw her—a vision plain, close to, detailed, plastic, coloured, lighted up—he saw her hanging round the neck of that fellow. And he shut his eyes, only to discover that this was no remedy. Then a piano began to play near by, very plainly; and he put his fingers to his ears with no better effect. It was not to be borne—not in solitude. He bolted out of the chart-room, and talked of indifferent things somewhat wildly with the officer of the watch on the bridge, to the mocking accompaniment of a ghostly piano.

The last thing to be recorded is that Lieutenant Heemskirk, instead of pursuing his course towards Ternate, where he was expected, went out of his way to call at Macassar, where no one was looking for his arrival. Once there, he gave certain explanations and laid a certain proposal before the Governor, or some other authority, and obtained permission to do what he thought fit in these matters. Thereupon the Neptun, giving up Ternate altogether, steamed north in view of the mountainous coast of Celebes, and then crossing the broad straits took up her station on the low coast of virgin forests, inviolate and mute, in waters phosphorescent at night, deep blue in daytime with gleaming green patches over the submerged reefs. For days the Neptun could be seen moving smoothly up and down the sombre face of the shore, or hanging about with a watchful air near the silvery breaks of broad estuaries, under the great luminous sky never softened, never veiled, and flooding the earth with the everlasting sunshine of the tropics—that sunshine which, in its unbroken splendour, oppresses the soul with an inexpressible melancholy more intimate, more penetrating, more profound than the grey sadness of the northern mists.

The trading brig *Bonito* appeared gliding round a sombre, forest-clad point of land on the silvery estuary of a great river. The breath of air that gave her motion would not have fluttered the flame of a torch. She stole out into the open from behind a veil of unstirring leaves, mysteriously silent, ghostly white, and solemnly stealthy in her imperceptible progress; and Jasper, his elbow in the main rigging, and his head leaning against his hand, thought of Freya. Everything in the world reminded him of her. The beauty of the loved woman exists in the beauties of

Nature. The swelling outlines of the hills, the curves of a coast, the free sinuosities of a river are less suave than the harmonious lines of her body, and when she moves, gliding lightly, the grace of her progress suggests the power of occult forces which rule the fascinating aspects of the visible world.

Dependent on things as all men are, Jasper loved his vessel—the house of his dreams. He lent to her something of Freya's soul. Her deck was the foothold of their love. The possession of his brig appeared his passion in a soothing certitude of happiness already conquered.

The full moon was some way up, perfect and serene, floating in air as calm and limpid as the glance of Freya's eyes. There was not a sound in

the brig.

'Here she shall stand, by my side, on evenings like this,' he thought,

with rapture.

And it was at that moment, in this peace, in this serenity, under the full, benign gaze of the moon propitious to lovers, on a sea without a wrinkle, under a sky without a cloud, as if all Nature had assumed its most clement mood in a spirit of mockery, that the gunboat *Neptun*, detaching herself from the dark coast under which she had been lying invisible, steamed out to intercept the trading brig *Bonito* standing out to sea.

Directly the gunboat had been made out emerging from her ambush, Schultz, of the fascinating voice, had given signs of strange agitation. All that day, ever since leaving the Malay town up the river, he had shown a haggard face, going about his duties like a man with something weighing on his mind. Jasper had noticed it, but the mate, turning away, as though he had not liked being looked at, had muttered shamefacedly of a headache and a touch of fever. He must have had it very badly when, dodging behind his captain, he wondered aloud, 'What can that fellow want with us?' . . . A naked man standing in a freezing blast and trying not to shiver could not have spoken with a more harshly uncertain intonation. But it might have been fever—a cold fit.

'He wants to make himself disagreeable, simply,' said Jasper, with perfect good humour. 'He has tried it on me before. However, we shall soon see.'

And, indeed, before long the two vessels lay abreast within easy hail. The brig, with her fine lines and her white sails, looked vaporous and sylph-like in the moonlight. The gunboat, short, squat, with her stumpy

dark spars naked like dead trees raised against the luminous sky of that resplendent night, threw a heavy shadow on the lane of water between the two ships.

Freya haunted them both like an ubiquitous spirit, and as if she were the only woman in the world. Jasper remembered her earnest recommendation to be guarded and cautious in all his acts and words while he was away from her. In this quite unforeseen encounter he felt on his ear the very breath of these hurried admonitions customary to the last moment of their partings, heard the half-jesting final whisper of the 'Mind, kid, I'd never forgive you!' with a quick pressure on his arm, which he answered by a quiet, confident smile. Heemskirk was haunted in another fashion. There were no whispers in it; it was more like visions. He saw that girl hanging round the neck of a low vagabond that vagabond, the vagabond who had just answered his hail. He saw her stealing barefooted across a verandah with great, clear, wide-open, eager eyes to look at a brig—that brig. If she had shrieked, scolded, called names! . . . But she had simply triumphed over him. That was all. Led on (he firmly believed it), fooled, deceived, outraged, struck, mocked at . . . Beak and claws! The two men, so differently haunted by Freya of the Seven Isles, were not equally matched.

In the intense stillness, as of sleep, which had fallen upon the two vessels, in a world that itself seemed but a delicate dream, a boat pulled by Javanese sailors crossing the dark lane of water came alongside the brig. The white warrant-officer in her, perhaps the gunner, climbed aboard. He was a short man, with a rotund stomach and a wheezy voice. His immovable fat face looked lifeless in the moonlight, and he walked with his thick arms hanging away from his body as though he had been stuffed. His cunning little eyes glittered like bits of mica. He conveyed to Jasper, in broken English, a request to come on board the *Neptun*.

Jasper had not expected anything so unusual. But after a short reflection he decided to show neither annoyance nor even surprise. The river from which he had come had been politically disturbed for a couple of years, and he was aware that his visits there were looked upon with some suspicion. But he did not mind much the displeasure of the authorities, so terrifying to old Nelson. He prepared to leave the brig, and Schultz followed him to the rail as if to say something, but in the end stood by in silence. Jasper, getting over the side, noticed his ghastly

face. The eyes of the man who had found salvation in the brig from the effects of his peculiar psychology looked at him with a dumb, beseeching expression.

'What's the matter?' Jasper asked.

'I wonder how this will end?' said he of the beautiful voice, which had even fascinated the steady Freya herself. But where was its charming timbre now? These words had sounded like a raven's croak.

'You are ill,' said Jasper positively.

'I wish I were dead!' was the startling statement uttered by Schultz talking to himself in the extremity of some mysterious trouble. Jasper gave him a keen glance, but this was not the time to investigate the morbid outbreak of a feverish man. He did not look as though he were actually delirious, and that for the moment must suffice. Schultz made a dart forward.

'That fellow means harm!' he said desperately. 'He means harm to you, Captain Allen. I feel it, and I——'

He choked with inexplicable emotion.

'All right, Schultz. I won't give him an opening.' Jasper cut him short and swung himself into the boat.

On board the *Neptun* Heemskirk, standing straddle-legs in the flood of moonlight, his inky shadow falling right across the quarterdeck, made no sign at his approach, but secretly he felt something like the heave of the sea in his chest at the sight of that man. Jasper waited before him in silence.

Brought face to face in direct personal contact, they fell at once into the manner of their casual meetings in old Nelson's bungalow. They ignored each other's existence—Heemskirk moodily, Jasper with a perfectly colourless quietness.

'What's going on in that river you've just come out of?' asked the lieutenant straight away.

'I know nothing of the troubles, if you mean that,' Jasper answered. 'I've landed there half a cargo of rice, for which I got nothing in exchange, and went away. There's no trade there now, but they would have been starving in another week if I hadn't turned up.'

'Meddling! English meddling! And suppose the rascals don't deserve anything better than to starve, eh?'

'There are women and children there, you know,' observed Jasper in his even tone.

'Oh yes! When an Englishman talks of women and children, you may be sure there's something fishy about the business. Your doings will have to be investigated.'

They spoke in turn, as though they had been disembodied spirits—mere voices in empty air; for they looked at each other as if there had been nothing there, or, at most, with as much recognition as one gives to an inanimate object, and no more. But now a silence fell. Heemskirk had thought, all at once, 'She will tell him all about it. She will tell him while she hangs round his neck laughing.' And the sudden desire to annihilate Jasper on the spot almost deprived him of his senses by its vehemence. He lost the power of speech, of vision. For a moment he absolutely couldn't see Jasper. But he heard him enquiring, as of the world at large:

'Am I, then, to conclude that the brig is detained?'

Heemskirk made a recovery in a flush of malignant satisfaction.

'She is. I am going to take her to Macassar in tow.'

'The courts will have to decide on the legality of this,' said Jasper, aware that the matter was becoming serious, but with assumed indifference.

'Oh yes, the courts! Certainly. And as to you, I shall keep you on board here.'

Jasper's dismay at being parted from his ship was betrayed by a stony immobility. It lasted but an instant. Then he turned away and hailed the brig. Mr Schultz answered:

'Yes, sir.'

'Get ready to receive a tow-rope from the gunboat! We are going to be taken to Macassar.'

'Good God! What's that for, sir?' came an anxious cry faintly.

'Kindness, I suppose,' Jasper, ironical, shouted with great deliberation. 'We might have been—becalmed in here—for days. And hospitality. I am invited to stay—on board here.'

The answer to this information was a loud ejaculation of distress. Jasper thought anxiously, 'Why, the fellow's nerve's gone to pieces'; and with an awkward uneasiness of a new sort, looked intently at the brig. The thought that he was parted from her—for the first time since they came together—shook the apparently careless fortitude of his character to its very foundations, which were deep. All that time neither Heemskirk nor even his inky shadow had stirred in the least.

'I am going to send a boat's crew and an officer on board your vessel,' he announced to no one in particular. Jasper, tearing himself away from the absorbed contemplation of the brig, turned round, and, without passion, almost without expression in his voice, entered his protest against the whole of the proceedings. What he was thinking of was the delay. He counted the days. Macassar was actually on his way; and to be towed there really saved time. On the other hand, there would be some vexing formalities to go through. But the thing was too absurd. 'The beetle's gone mad,' he thought. 'I'll be released at once. And if not, Mesman must enter into a bond for me.' Mesman was a Dutch merchant with whom Jasper had had many dealings, a considerable person in Macassar.

'You protest? H'm!' Heemskirk muttered, and for a little longer remained motionless, his legs planted well apart, and his head lowered as though he were studying his own comical, deeply split shadow. Then he made a sign to the rotund gunner, who had kept at hand, motionless, like a vilely stuffed specimen of a fat man, with a lifeless face and glittering little eyes. The fellow approached, and stood at attention.

'You will board the brig with a boat's crew!'

'Ya, mynherr!'

'You will have one of your men to steer her all the time,' went on Heemskirk, giving his orders in English, apparently for Jasper's edification. 'You hear?'

'Ya, mynherr.'

'You will remain on deck and in charge all the time.'

'Ya, mynherr.'

Jasper felt as if, together with the command of the brig, his very heart were being taken out of his breast. Heemskirk asked, with a change of tone:

'What weapons have you on board?'

At one time all the ships trading in the China Seas had a licence to carry a certain quantity of firearms for purposes of defence. Jasper answered:

'Eighteen rifles with their bayonets, which were on board when I bought her, four years ago. They have been declared.'

'Where are they kept?'

'Fore-cabin. Mate has the key.'

'You will take possession of them,' said Heemskirk to the gunner.

'Ya, mynherr.'

'What is this for? What do you mean to imply?' cried out Jasper; then bit his lip. 'It's monstrous!' he muttered.

Heemskirk raised for a moment a heavy, as if suffering, glance. 'You may go,' he said to his gunner. The fat man saluted, and departed.

During the next thirty hours the steady towing was interrupted once. At a signal from the brig, made by waving a flag on the forecastle, the gunboat was stopped. The badly stuffed specimen of a warrant-officer, getting into his boat, arrived on board the Neptun and hurried straight into his commander's cabin, his excitement at something he had to communicate being betrayed by the blinking of his small eyes. These two were closeted together for some time, while Jasper at the taffrail tried to make out if anything out of the common had occurred on board the brig. But nothing seemed to be amiss on board. However, he kept a lookout for the gunner; and, though he had avoided speaking to anybody since he had finished with Heemskirk, he stopped that man when he came out on deck again to ask how his mate was.

'He was feeling not very well when I left,' he explained.

The fat warrant-officer, holding himself as though the effort of carrying his big stomach in front of him demanded a rigid carriage, understood with difficulty. Not a single one of his features showed the slightest animation, but his little eyes blinked rapidly at last.

'Oh, ya! The mate. Ya, ya! He is very well. But, mein Gott, he is one

very funny man!'

Jasper could get no explanation of that remark, because the Dutchman got into the boat hurriedly and went back on board the brig. But he consoled himself with the thought that very soon all this unpleasant and rather absurd experience would be over. The roadstead of Macassar was in sight already. Heemskirk passed by him going on the bridge. For the first time the lieutenant looked at Jasper with marked intention; and the strange roll of his eyes was so funny—it had been long agreed by Jasper and Freya that the lieutenant was funny—so ecstatically gratified, as though he were rolling a tasty morsel on his tongue, that Jasper could not help a broad smile. And then he turned to his brig again.

To see her, his cherished possession, animated by something of his Freya's soul, the only foothold of two lives on the wide earth, the security of his passion, the companion of adventure, the power to snatch the calm, adorable Freya to his breast, and carry her off to the end of the world; to see this beautiful thing embodying worthily his pride and his love, to see her captive at the end of a tow-rope was not indeed a pleasant experience. It had something nightmarish in it, as, for instance, the dream of a wild sea-bird loaded with chains.

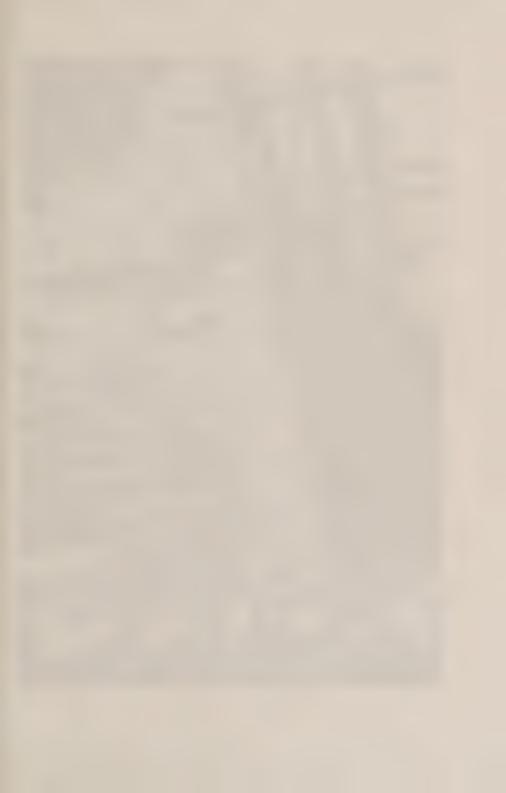
Yet what else could he want to look at? Her beauty would sometimes come to his heart with the force of a spell, so that he would forget where he was. And, besides, that sense of superiority which the certitude of being loved gives to a young man, that illusion of being set above the Fates by a tender look in a woman's eyes, helped him, the first shock over, to go through these experiences with an amused self-confidence. For what evil could touch the elect of Freya?

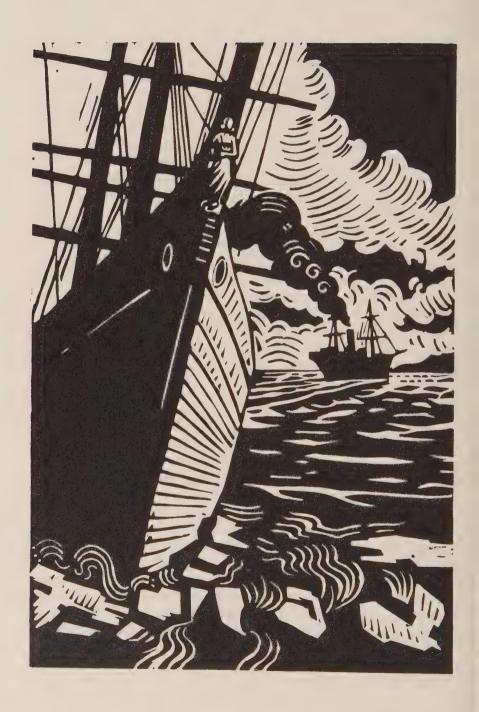
It was now afternoon, the sun being behind the two vessels as they headed for the harbour. 'The beetle's little joke shall soon be over,' thought Jasper, without any great animosity. As a seaman well acquainted with that part of the world, a casual glance was enough to tell him what was being done. 'Hallo,' he thought, 'he is going through Spermonde Passage. We shall be rounding Tamissa reef presently.' And again he returned to the contemplation of his brig, that mainstay of his material and emotional existence which would be soon in his hands again. On a sea, calm like a mill-pond, a heavy smooth ripple undulated and streamed away from her bows, for the powerful *Neptun* was towing at great speed, as if for a wager. The Dutch gunner appeared on the forecastle of the *Bonito*, and with him a couple of men. They stood looking at the coast, and Jasper lost himself in a lover-like trance.

The deep-toned blast of the gunboat's steam-whistle made him shudder by its unexpectedness. Slowly he looked about. Swift as lightning he leaped from where he stood, bounding forward along the deck.

'You will be on Tamissa reef!' he yelled.

High up on the bridge Heemskirk looked back over his shoulder heavily; two seamen were spinning the wheel round, and the *Neptun* was already swinging rapidly away from the edge of the pale water over the danger. Ha! Just in time. Jasper turned about instantly to watch his brig; and, even before he realised that—in obedience, it appears, to Heemskirk's orders given beforehand to the gunner—the tow-rope had been let go at the blast of the whistle, before he had time to cry out or to move a limb, he saw her cast adrift and shooting across the gunboat's stern with the impetus of her speed. He followed her fine, gliding





form with eyes growing big with incredulity, wild with horror. The cries on board of her came to him only as a dreadful and confused murmur through the loud thumping of blood in his ears, while she held on. She ran upright in a terrible display of her gift of speed, with an incomparable air of life and grace. She ran on till the smooth level of water in front of her bows seemed to sink down suddenly as if sucked away; and, with a strange, violent tremor of her mast-heads, she stopped, inclined her lofty spars a little, and lay still. She lay still on the reef, while the *Neptun*, fetching a wide circle, continued at full speed up Spermonde Passage, heading for the town. She lay still, perfectly still, with something ill-omened and unnatural in her attitude. In an instant the subtle melancholy of things touched by decay had fallen on her in the sunshine; she was but a speck in the brilliant emptiness of space, already lonely, already desolate.

'Hold him!' yelled a voice from the bridge.

Jasper had started to run to his brig with a headlong impulse, as a man dashes forward to pull away with his hands a living, breathing, loved creature from the brink of destruction. 'Hold him! Stick to him!' vociferated the lieutenant at the top of the bridge-ladder, while Jasper struggled madly without a word, only his head emerging from the heaving crowd of the *Neptun*'s seamen, who had flung themselves upon him obediently. 'Hold—— I would not have that fellow drown himself for anything now!'

Jasper ceased struggling.

One by one they let go of him; they fell back gradually further and further, in attentive silence, leaving him standing unsupported in a widened, clear space, as if to give him plenty of room to fall after the struggle. He did not even sway perceptibly. Half an hour later, when the *Neptun* anchored in front of the town, he had not stirred yet, had moved neither head nor limb as much as a hair's breadth. Directly the rumble of the gunboat's cable had ceased, Heemskirk came down heavily from the bridge.

'Call a sampan,' he said in a gloomy tone, as he passed the sentry at the gangway, and then moved on slowly towards the spot where Jasper, the object of many awed glances, stood looking at the deck, as if lost in a brown study. Heemskirk came up close, and stared at him thoughtfully, with his fingers over his lips. Here he was, the favoured vagabond, the only man to whom that infernal girl was likely to tell the story. But he would not find it funny. The story how Lieutenant Heemskirk——No, he would not laugh at it. He looked as though he would never laugh at anything in his life.

Suddenly Jasper looked up. His eyes, without any other expression but bewilderment, met those of Heemskirk, observant and sombre.

'Gone on the reef!' he said in a low, astounded tone. 'On—the—reef!' he repeated still lower, and as if attending inwardly to the birth of

some awful and amazing sensation.

'On the very top of high water, spring-tides,' Heemskirk struck in, with a vindictive, exulting violence which flashed and expired. He paused, as if weary, fixing upon Jasper his arrogant eyes, over which secret disenchantment, the unavoidable shadow of all passion, seemed to pass like a saddening cloud. 'On the very top,' he repeated, rousing himself in fierce reaction to snatch his laced cap off his head with a horizontal, derisive flourish towards the gangway. 'And now you may go ashore to the courts, you damned Englishman!' he said.

## **6**

The affair of the brig *Bonito* was bound to cause a sensation in Macassar, the prettiest, and perhaps the cleanest-looking of all the towns in the islands; which, however, knows few occasions for excitement. The 'front', with its special population, was soon aware that something had happened. A steamer towing a sailing-vessel had been observed far out to sea for some time, and when the steamer came in alone, leaving the other outside, attention was aroused. Why was that? Her masts only could be seen—with furled sails—remaining in the same place to the southward. And soon the rumour ran all along the crowded seashore street that there was a ship on Tamissa reef. That crowd interpreted the appearance correctly. Its cause was beyond their penetration, for who could associate a girl nine hundred miles away with the stranding of a ship on Tamissa reef, or look for the remote filiation of that event in the psychology of at least three people, even if one of them, Lieutenant Heemskirk, was at that very moment passing amongst them on his way to make his verbal report?

No; the minds on the 'front' were not competent for that sort of investigation, but many hands there—brown hands, yellow hands,

white hands—were raised to shade the eyes gazing out to sea. The rumour spread quickly. Chinese shopkeepers came to their doors, more than one white merchant, even, rose from his desk to go to the window. After all, a ship on Tamissa was not an everyday occurrence. And presently the rumour took a more definite shape. An English trader—detained on suspicion at sea by the *Neptun*—Heemskirk was towing him in to test a case, and by some strange accident—

Later on the name came out. 'The *Bonito*—what! Impossible! Yes—yes, the *Bonito*. Look! You can see from here; only two masts. It's a brig. Didn't think that man would ever let himself be caught. Heemskirk's pretty smart too. They say she's fitted out in her cabin like a gentleman's yacht. That Allen is a sort of gentleman, too. An extravagant beggar.'

A young man entered smartly Messrs Mesman Brothers' office on

the 'front', bubbling with some further information.

'Oh yes; that's the *Bonito* for certain! But you don't know the story I've heard just now. The fellow must have been feeding that river with firearms for the last year or two. Well, it seems he has grown so reckless from long impunity that he has actually dared to sell the very ship's rifles this time. It's a fact. The rifles are not on board. What impudence! Only, he didn't know that there was one of our warships on the coast. But those Englishmen are so impudent that perhaps he thought that nothing would be done to him for it. Our courts do let off these fellows too often, on some miserable excuse or other. But, at any rate, there's an end of the famous *Bonito*. I have just heard in the Harbour Office that she must have gone on at the very top of high water; and she is in ballast, too. No human power, they think, can move her from where she is. I only hope it is so. It would be fine to have the notorious *Bonito* stuck up there as a warning to others.'

Mr J. Mesman, a colonial-born Dutchman, a kind, paternal old fellow, with a clean-shaven, quiet, handsome face, and a head of fine irongrey hair curling a little on his collar, did not say a word in defence of Jasper and the *Bonito*. He rose from his armchair suddenly. His face was visibly troubled. It had so happened that once, from a business talk of ways and means, island trade, money matters, and so on, Jasper had been led to open himself to him on the subject of Freya; and the excellent man, who had known old Nelson years before and even remembered something of Freya, was much astonished and amused by the

unfolding of the tale.

'Well, well! Nelson! Yes; of course. A very honest sort of man. And a little child with very fair hair. Oh yes! I have a distinct recollection. And so she has grown into such a fine girl, so very determined, so very——' And he laughed almost boisterously. 'Mind, when you have happily eloped with your future wife, Captain Allen, you must come along this way, and we shall welcome her here. A little fair-headed child! I remember. I remember.'

It was that knowledge which had brought trouble to his face at the first news of the wreck. He took up his hat.

'Where are you going, Mr Mesman?'

'I am going to look for Allen. I think he must be ashore. Does any-body know?'

No one of those present knew. And Mr Mesman went out on the

'front' to make enquiries.

The other part of the town, the part near the church and the fort, got its information in another way. The first thing disclosed to it was Jasper himself, walking rapidly, as though he were pursued. And, as a matter of fact, a Chinaman, obviously a sampan man, was following him at the same headlong pace. Suddenly, while passing Orange House, Jasper swerved and went in, or, rather, rushed in, startling Gomez, the hotel clerk, very much. But a Chinaman beginning to make an unseemly noise at the door claimed the immediate attention of Gomez. His grievance was that the white man whom he had brought on shore from the gunboat had not paid him his boat-fare. He had pursued him so far, asking for it all the way. But the white man had taken no notice whatever of his just claim. Gomez satisfied the coolie with a few coppers, and then went to look for Jasper, whom he knew very well. He found him standing stiffly by a little round table. At the other end of the verandah a few men sitting there had stopped talking, and were looking at him in silence. Two billiard-players, with cues in their hands, had come to the door of the billiard-room and stared too.

On Gomez coming up to him, Jasper raised one hand to point at his own throat. Gomez noted the somewhat soiled state of his white clothes, then took one look at his face, and fled away to order the drink for which Jasper seemed to be asking.

Where he wanted to go—for what purpose—where he, perhaps, only imagined himself to be going, when a sudden impulse or the sight of a familiar place had made him turn into Orange House—it is impos-

sible to say. He was steadying himself lightly with the tips of his fingers on the little table. There were on that verandah two men whom he knew well personally, but his gaze, roaming incessantly as though he were looking for a way of escape, passed and repassed over them without a sign of recognition. They, on their side, looking at him, doubted the evidence of their own eyes. It was not that his face was distorted. On the contrary, it was still, it was set. But its expression, somehow, was unrecognisable. Can that be him? they wondered with awe.

In his head there was a wild chaos of clear thoughts. Perfectly clear. It was this clearness which was so terrible in conjunction with the utter inability to lay hold of any single one of them all. He was saying to himself, or to them, 'Steady, steady.' A China boy appeared before him with a glass on a tray. He poured the drink down his throat, and rushed out. His disappearance removed the spell of wonder from the beholders. One of the men jumped up and moved quickly to that side of the verandah from which almost the whole of the roadstead could be seen. At the very moment when Jasper, issuing from the door of the Orange House, was passing under him in the street below, he cried to the others excitedly:

'That was Allen right enough! But where is his brig?'

Jasper heard these words with extraordinary loudness. The heavens rang with them, as if calling him to account; for those were the very words Freya would have to use. It was an annihilating question; it struck his consciousness like a thunderbolt, and brought a sudden night upon the chaos of his thoughts even as he walked. He did not check his pace. He went on in the darkness for another three strides, and then fell.

The good Mesman had to push on as far as the hospital before he found him. The doctor there talked of a slight heatstroke. Nothing very much. Out in three days . . . It must be admitted that the doctor was right. In three days, Jasper Allen came out of the hospital and became visible to the town—very visible indeed—and remained so for quite a long time; long enough to become almost one of the sights of the place; long enough to become disregarded at last; long enough for the tale of his haunting visibility to be remembered in the islands to this day.

The talk on the 'front' and Jasper's appearance in the Orange House stand at the beginning of the famous *Bonito* case, and give a view of its two aspects—the practical and the psychological. The case for the

courts and the case for compassion; that last terribly evident and yet obscure.

It has, you must understand, remained obscure even for that friend of mine who wrote me the letter mentioned in the very first lines of this narrative. He was one of those in Mr Mesman's office, and accompanied that gentleman in his search for Jasper. His letter described to me the two aspects and some of the episodes of the case. Heemskirk's attitude was that of deep thankfulness for not having lost his own ship, and that was all. Haze over the land was his explanation of having got so close to Tamissa reef. He saved his ship, and for the rest he did not care. As to the fat gunner, he deposed simply that he thought at the time that he was acting for the best by letting go the tow-rope, but admitted that he was greatly confused by the suddenness of the emergency.

As a matter of fact, he had acted on very precise instructions from Heemskirk, to whom, through several years' service together in the East, he had become a sort of devoted henchman. What was most amazing in the detention of the Bonito was his story how, proceeding to take possession of the firearms as ordered, he discovered that there were no firearms on board. All he found in the fore-cabin was an empty rack for the proper number of eighteen rifles, but of the rifles themselves never a single one anywhere in the ship. The mate of the brig, who looked rather ill and behaved excitedly, as though he were perhaps a lunatic, wanted him to believe that Captain Allen knew nothing of this; that it was he, the mate, who had recently sold these rifles in the dead of night to a certain person up the river. In proof of this story he produced a bag of silver dollars and pressed it on his, the gunner's, acceptance. Then, suddenly flinging it down on the deck, he beat his own head with both his fists and started heaping shocking curses upon his own soul for an ungrateful wretch not fit to live.

All this the gunner reported at once to his commanding officer.

What Heemskirk intended by taking upon himself to detain the *Bonito* it is difficult to say, except that he meant to bring some trouble into the life of the man favoured by Freya. He had been looking at Jasper with a desire to strike that man of kisses and embraces to the earth. The question was: How could he do it without giving himself away? But the report of the gunner created a serious case enough. Yet Allen had friends—and who could tell whether he wouldn't somehow

succeed in wriggling out of it? The idea of simply towing the brig so much compromised on to the reef came to him while he was listening to the fat gunner in his cabin. There was but little risk of being disapproved now. And it should be made to appear an accident.

Going out on deck he had gloated upon his unconscious victim with such a sinister roll of his eyes, such a queerly pursed mouth, that Jasper could not help smiling. And the lieutenant had gone on the bridge, saying to himself:

'You wait! I shall spoil the taste of those sweet kisses for you. When you hear of Lieutenant Heemskirk in the future that name won't bring a smile on your lips, I swear. You are delivered into my hands.'

And this possibility had come about without any planning, one could almost say naturally, as if events had mysteriously shaped themselves to fit the purposes of a dark passion. The most astute scheming could not have served Heemskirk better. It was given to him to taste a transcendental, an incredible perfection of vengeance; to strike a deadly blow into that hated person's heart, and to watch him afterwards walking about with the dagger in his breast.

For that is what the state of Jasper amounted to. He moved, acted, weary-eyed, keen-faced, lank and restless, with brusque movements and fierce gestures; he talked incessantly in a frenzied and fatigued voice, but within himself he knew that nothing would ever give him back the brig, just as nothing can heal a pierced heart. His soul, kept quiet in the stress of love by the unflinching Freya's influence, was like a still but overwound string. The shock had started it vibrating, and the string had snapped. He had waited for two years in a perfectly intoxicated confidence for a day that now would never come to a man disarmed for life by the loss of the brig, and, it seemed to him, made unfit for love to which he had no foothold to offer.

Day after day he would traverse the length of the town, follow the coast, and, reaching the point of land opposite that part of the reef on which his brig lay stranded, look steadily across the water at her beloved form, once the home of an exulting hope, and now, in her inclined, desolated immobility, towering above the lonely sea-horizon, a symbol of despair.

The crew had left her in due course in her own boats, which directly they reached the town were sequestrated by the harbour authorities. The vessel, too, was sequestrated pending proceedings; but these same authorities did not take the trouble to set a guard on board. For, indeed, what could move her from there? Nothing, unless a miracle; nothing, unless Jasper's eyes, fastened on her tensely for hours together, as though he hoped by the mere power of vision to draw her to his breast.

All this story, read in my friend's very chatty letter, dismayed me not a little. But it was really appalling to read his relation of how Schultz, the mate, went about everywhere affirming with desperate pertinacity that it was he alone who had sold the rifles. 'I stole them,' he protested. Of course, no one would believe him. My friend himself did not believe him, though he, of course, admired this self-sacrifice. But a good many people thought it was going too far to make oneself out a thief for the sake of a friend. Only, it was such an obvious lie, too, that it did not matter, perhaps.

I, who, in view of Schultz's psychology, knew how true that must be, admit that I was appalled. So this was how a perfidious destiny took advantage of a generous impulse! And I felt as though I were an accomplice in this perfidy, since I did to a certain extent encourage Jasper. Yet I had warned him as well.

'The man seemed to have gone crazy on this point,' wrote my friend. 'He went to Mesman with his story. He says that some rascally white man living amongst the natives up that river made him drunk with some gin one evening, and then jeered at him for never having any money. Then he, protesting to us that he was an honest man and must be believed, described himself as being a thief whenever he took a drop too much, and told us that he went on board and passed the rifles one by one without the slightest compunction to a canoe which came alongside that night, receiving ten dollars apiece for them.

'Next day he was ill with shame and grief, but had not the courage to confess his lapse to his benefactor. When the gunboat stopped the brig he felt ready to die with the apprehension of the consequences, and would have died happily, if he could have been able to bring the rifles back by the sacrifice of his life. He said nothing to Jasper, hoping that the brig would be released presently. When it turned out otherwise and his captain was detained on board the gunboat, he was ready to commit suicide from despair; only he thought it his duty to live in order to let the truth be known. "I am an honest man! I am an honest man!" he repeated, in a voice that brought tears to our eyes. "You must believe me when I tell you that I am a thief—a vile, low, cunning, sneaking thief

as soon as I've had a glass or two. Take me somewhere where I may tell the truth on oath."

'When we had at last convinced him that his story could be of no use to Jasper—for what Dutch court, having once got hold of an English trader, would accept such an explanation; and, indeed, how, when, where could one hope to find proofs of such a tale?—he made as if to tear his hair in handfuls, but, calming down, said, "Goodbye, then, gentlemen," and went out of the room so crushed that he seemed hardly able to put one foot before the other. That very night he committed suicide by cutting his throat in the house of a half-caste with whom he had been lodging since he came ashore from the wreck.'

That throat, I thought with a shudder, which could produce the tender, persuasive, manly, but fascinating voice which had aroused Jasper's ready compassion and had secured Freya's sympathy! Who could ever have supposed such an end in store for the impossible, gentle Schultz, with his idiosyncrasy of naïve pilfering, so absurdly straightforward that, even in the people who had suffered from it, it aroused nothing more than a sort of amused exasperation? He was really impossible. His lot evidently should have been a half-starved, mysterious, but by no means tragic existence as a mild-eyed, inoffensive beachcomber on the fringe of native life. There are occasions when the irony of fate, which some people profess to discover in the working-out of our lives, wears the aspect of crude and savage jesting.

I shook my head over the manes of Schultz, and went on with my friend's letter. It told me how the brig on the reef, looted by the natives from the coast villages, acquired gradually the lamentable aspect, the grey ghostliness of a wreck; while Jasper, fading daily into a mere shadow of a man, strode brusquely all along the 'front' with horribly lively eyes and a faint, fixed smile on his lips, to spend the day on a lonely spit of sand looking eagerly at her, as though he had expected some shape on board to rise up and make some sort of sign to him over the decaying bulwarks. The Mesmans were taking care of him as far as it was possible. The *Bonito* case had been referred to Batavia, where no doubt it would fade away in a fog of official papers . . . It was heart-rending to read all this. That active and zealous officer, Lieutenant Heemskirk, his air of sullen, darkly pained self-importance not lightened by the approval of his action conveyed to him unofficially, had gone on to take up his station in the Moluccas . . .

Then, at the end of the bulky, kindly meant epistle, dealing with the island news of half a year at least, my friend wrote:

A couple of months ago old Nelson turned up here, arriving by the mail-boat from Java. Came to see Mesman, it seems. A rather mysterious visit, and extraordinarily short, after coming all that way. He stayed just four days at the Orange House, with apparently nothing in particular to do, and then caught the south-going steamer for the Straits. I remember people saying at one time that Allen was rather sweet on old Nelson's daughter, the girl that was brought up by Mrs Harley and then went to live with him at the Seven Isles group. Surely you remember old Nelson—

## Remember old Nelson! Rather!

The letter went on to inform me further that old Nelson, at least, remembered me, since some time after his flying visit to Macassar he had written to the Mesmans asking for my address in London.

That old Nelson (or Nielsen), the note of whose personality was a profound, echoless irresponsiveness to everything around him, should wish to write, or find anything to write about to anybody, was in itself a cause for no small wonder. And to me, of all people! I waited with uneasy impatience for whatever disclosure could come from that naturally benighted intelligence, but my impatience had time to wear out before my eyes beheld old Nelson's trembling, painfully formed handwriting, senile and childish at the same time, on an envelope bearing a penny stamp and the postal mark of the Notting Hill office. I delayed opening it in order to pay the tribute of astonishment due to the event by flinging my hands above my head. So he had come home to England, to be definitely Nelson; or else was on his way home to Denmark, where he would revert for ever to his original Nielsen! But old Nelson (or Nielsen) out of the tropics seemed unthinkable. And yet he was there, asking me to call.

His address was at a boarding-house in one of those Bayswater squares, once of leisure, which nowadays are reduced to earning their living. Somebody had recommended him there. I started to call on him on one of those January days in London, one of those wintry days composed of the four devilish elements, cold, wet, mud, and grime, combined with a particular stickiness of atmosphere that clings like an

unclean garment to one's very soul. Yet on approaching his abode I saw, like a flicker far behind the soiled veil of the four elements, the wearisome and splendid glitter of a blue sea with the Seven Islets like minute specks swimming in my eye, the high red roof of the bungalow, crowning the very smallest of them all. This visual reminiscence was profoundly disturbing. I knocked at the door with a faltering hand.

Old Nelson (or Nielsen) got up from the table at which he was sitting with a shabby pocket-book full of papers before him. He took off his spectacles before shaking hands. For a moment neither of us said a word; then, noticing me looking round somewhat expectantly, he murmured some words, of which I caught only 'daughter' and 'Hong

Kong', cast his eyes down, and sighed.

His moustache, sticking all ways out, as of yore, was quite white now. His old cheeks were softly rounded, with some colour in them; strangely enough, that something childlike always noticeable in the general contour of his physiognomy had become much more marked. Like his handwriting, he looked childish and senile. He showed his age most in his unintelligently furrowed, anxious forehead and in his round, innocent eyes, which appeared to me weak and blinking and watery; or was it that they were full of tears? . . .

To discover old Nelson fully informed upon any matter whatever was a new experience. And after the first awkwardness had worn off he talked freely, with, now and then, a question to start him going whenever he lapsed into silence, which he would do suddenly, clasping his hands on his waistcoat in an attitude which would recall to me the east verandah, where he used to sit talking quietly and puffing out his cheeks in what seemed now old, very old days. He talked in a reasonable, somewhat anxious tone.

'No, no. We did not know anything for weeks. Out of the way like that, we couldn't, of course. No mail service to the Seven Isles. But one day I ran over to Banka in my big sailing-boat to see whether there were any letters, and saw a Dutch paper. But it looked only like a bit of marine news: English brig *Bonito* gone ashore outside Macassar Roads. That was all. I took the paper home with me and showed it to her. "I will never forgive him!" she cries, with her old spirit. "My dear," I said, "you are a sensible girl. The best man may lose a ship. But what about your health?" I was beginning to be frightened at her looks. She would not let me talk even of going to Singapore before. But, really, such a

sensible girl couldn't keep on objecting for ever. "Do what you like, papa," she says. Rather a job, that. Had to catch a steamer at sea, but I got her over all right. There, doctors, of course. Fever. Anaemia. Put her to bed. Two or three women very kind to her. Naturally in our papers the whole story came out before long. She reads it to the end, lying on the couch; then hands the newspaper back to me, whispers "Heemskirk", and goes off into a faint.'

He blinked at me for quite a long time, his eyes running full of tears

again.

'Next day,' he began, without any emotion in his voice, 'she felt

stronger, and we had a long talk. She told me everything.'

Here old Nelson, with his eyes cast down, gave me the whole story of the Heemskirk episode in Freya's words; then went on in his rather

jerky utterance, and looking up innocently:

"My dear," I said, "you have behaved in the main like a sensible girl." "I have been horrid," she cries, "and he is breaking his heart over there." Well, she was too sensible not to see she wasn't in a state to travel. But I went. She told me to go. She was being looked after very well. Anaemia. Getting better, they said."

He paused.

'You did see him?' I murmured.

'Oh yes; I did see him,' he started again, talking in that reasonable voice as though he were arguing a point. 'I did see him. I came upon him. Eyes sunk an inch into his head; nothing but skin on the bones of his face, a skeleton in dirty white clothes. That's what he looked like. How Freya... But she never did—not really. He was sitting there, the only live thing for miles along that coast, on a drift-log washed up on the shore. They had clipped his hair in the hospital, and it had not grown again. He stared, holding his chin in his hand, and with nothing on the sea between him and the sky but that wreck. When I came up to him he just moved his head a bit. "Is that you, old man?" says he—like that.

'If you had seen him you would have understood at once how impossible it was for Freya to have ever loved that man. Well, well. I don't say. She might have—something. She was lonely, you know. But really to go away with him! Never! Madness. She was too sensible . . . I began to reproach him gently. And by-and-by he turns on me. "Write to you! What about? Come to her! What with? If I had been a man I

would have carried her off, but she made a child, a happy child, of me. Tell her that the day the only thing I had belonging to me in the world perished on this reef I discovered that I had no power over her . . . Has she come here with you?" he shouts, blazing at me suddenly with his hollow eyes. I shook my head. Come with me, indeed! Anaemia! "Aha! You see? Go away, then, old man, and leave me alone here with that ghost," he says, jerking his head at the wreck of his brig.

'Mad! It was getting dusk. I did not care to stop any longer all by myself with that man in that lonely place. I was not going to tell him of Freya's illness. Anaemia! What was the good? Mad! And what sort of husband would he have made, anyhow, for a sensible girl like Freya? Why, even my little property I could not have left them. The Dutch authorities would never have allowed an Englishman to settle there. It was not sold then. My man Mahmat, you know, was looking after it for me. Later on I let it go for a tenth of its value to a Dutch half-caste. But never mind. It was nothing to me then. Yes; I went away from him. I caught the return mail-boat. I told everything to Freya. "He's mad," I said; "and, my dear, the only thing he loved was his brig."

"Perhaps," she says to herself, looking straight away—her eyes were nearly as hollow as his—"perhaps it is true. Yes! I would never

allow him any power over me." '

Old Nelson paused. I sat fascinated, and feeling a little cold in that

room with a blazing fire.

'So you see,' he continued, 'she never really cared for him. Much too sensible. I took her away to Hong Kong. Change of climate, they said. Oh, those doctors! My God! Winter-time! There came ten days of cold mists and wind and rain. Pneumonia. But look here! We talked a lot together. Days and evenings. Who else had she? . . . She talked a lot to me, my own girl. Sometimes she would laugh a little. Look at me and laugh a little——'

I shuddered. He looked up vaguely, with a childish, puzzled moodiness.

'She would say, "I did not really mean to be a bad daughter to you, papa." And I would say, "Of course, my dear. You could not have meant it." She would lie quiet and then say, "I wonder?" And sometimes, "I've been really a coward," she would tell me. You know, sick people they say things. And so she would say too, "I've been conceited, headstrong, capricious. I sought my own gratification. I was selfish or

afraid."... But sick people, you know, they say anything. And once, after lying silent almost all day, she said, "Yes; perhaps when the day came I would not have gone. Perhaps! I don't know," she cried. "Draw the curtain, papa. Shut the sea out. It reproaches me with my folly." He gasped and paused.

'So you see,' he went on in a murmur. 'Very ill, very ill indeed. Pneumonia. Very sudden.' He pointed his finger at the carpet, while the thought of the poor girl, vanquished in her struggle with three men's absurdities, and coming at last to doubt her own self, held me in a very

anguish of pity.

'You see yourself,' he began again in a downcast manner. 'She could not have really . . . She mentioned you several times. Good friend. Sensible man. So I wanted to tell you myself—let you know the truth. A fellow like that! How could it be? She was lonely. And perhaps for a while . . . Mere nothing. There could never have been a question of love for my Freya—such a sensible girl—'

'Man!' I cried, rising upon him wrathfully, 'don't you see that she

died of it?'

He got up too. 'No! no!' he stammered, as if angry. 'The doctors! Pneumonia. Low state. The inflammation of the . . . They told me. Pneu——'

He did not finish the word. It ended in a sob. He flung his arms out in a gesture of despair, giving up his ghastly pretence with a low, heartrending cry:

'And I thought that she was so sensible!'

## Tales of Hearsay

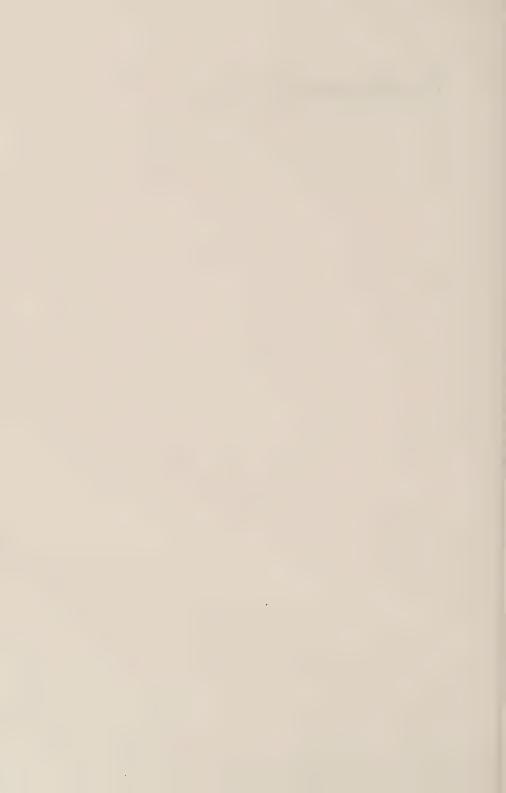


The title chosen for this book, Tales of Hearsay, is one which Mr Conrad long had in his mind for a future volume of short stories.

As it fits very well the four stories included here it has been deemed proper to give the title which had Mr Conrad's own authority.



## The Warrior's Soul



The old officer with long white moustaches gave rein to his indignation.

'Is it possible that you youngsters should have no more sense than that! Some of you had better wipe the milk off your upper lip before you start to pass judgement on the few poor stragglers of a generation which has done and suffered not a little in its time.'

His hearers having expressed much compunction the ancient warrior became appeared. But he was not silenced.

'I am one of them—one of the stragglers, I mean,' he went on patiently. 'And what did we do? What have we achieved? He—the great Napoleon—started upon us to emulate the Macedonian Alexander, with a ruck of nations at his back. We opposed empty spaces to French impetuosity, then we offered them an interminable battle so that their army went at last to sleep in its positions lying down on the heaps of its own dead. Then came the wall of fire in Moscow. It toppled down on them.

'Then began the long rout of the Grand Army. I have seen it stream on, like the doomed flight of haggard, spectral sinners across the innermost frozen circle of Dante's Inferno ever widening before their despairing eyes.

'They who escaped must have had their souls doubly riveted inside their bodies to carry them out of Russia through that frost fit to split rocks. But to say that it was our fault that a single one of them got away is mere ignorance. Why! Our own men suffered nearly to the limit of their strength. Their Russian strength!

'Of course our spirit was not broken; and then our cause was good—it was holy. But that did not temper the wind much to men and horses.

'The flesh is weak. Good or evil purpose, Humanity has to pay the price. Why! In that very fight for that little village of which I have been telling you we were fighting for the shelter of those old houses as much as victory. And with the French it was the same.

'It wasn't for the sake of glory, or for the sake of strategy. The French knew that they would have to retreat before morning and we knew perfectly well that they would go. As far as the war was concerned there was nothing to fight about. Yet our infantry and theirs fought like wild cats, or like heroes if you like that better, amongst the houses—hot work enough—while the supports out in the open stood freezing in a tempestuous north wind which drove the snow on earth and the great

masses of clouds in the sky at a terrific pace. The very air was inexpressibly sombre by contrast with the white earth. I have never seen God's creation look more sinister than on that day.

'We, the cavalry (we were only a handful), had not much to do except turn our backs to the wind and receive some stray French round shot. This, I may tell you, was the last of the French guns and it was the last time they had their artillery in position. Those guns never went away from there either. We found them abandoned next morning. But that afternoon they were keeping up an infernal fire on our attacking column; the furious wind carried away the smoke and even the noise but we could see the constant flicker of the tongues of fire along the French front. Then a driving flurry of snow would hide everything except the dark-red flashes in the white swirl.

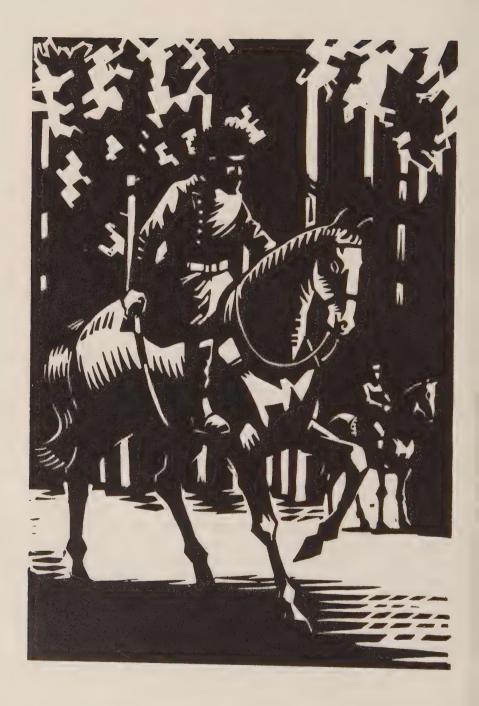
'At intervals when the line cleared we could see away across the plain to the right a sombre column moving endlessly; the great rout of the Grand Army creeping on and on all the time while the fight on our left went on with a great din and fury. The cruel whirlwind of snow swept over that scene of death and desolation. And then the wind fell as suddenly as it had arisen in the morning.

'Presently we got orders to charge the retreating column; I don't know why unless they wanted to prevent us from getting frozen in our saddles by giving us something to do. We changed front half right and got into motion at a walk to take that distant dark line in flank. It might have been half-past two in the afternoon.

'You must know that so far in this campaign my regiment had never been on the main line of Napoleon's advance. All these months since the invasion the army we belonged to had been wrestling with Oudinot in the north. We had only come down lately driving him before us to the Beresina.

'This was the first occasion then that I and my comrades had a close view of Napoleon's Grand Army. It was an amazing and terrible sight. I had heard of it from others; I had seen the stragglers from it; small bands of marauders, parties of prisoners in the distance. But this was the very column itself! A crawling, stumbling, starved, half-demented mob. It issued from the forest a mile away and its head was lost in the murk of the fields. We rode into it at a trot, which was the most we could get out of our horses, and we stuck in that human mass as if in a moving bog. There was no resistance. I heard a few shots, half a dozen





perhaps. Their very senses seemed frozen within them. I had time for a good look while riding at the head of my squadron. Well, I assure you, there were men walking on the outer edge so lost to everything but their misery that they never turned their heads to look at our charge. Soldiers!

'My horse pushed over one of them with his chest. The poor wretch had a dragoon's blue cloak, all torn and scorched, hanging from his shoulders, and he didn't even put his hand out to snatch at my bridle and save himself. He just went down. Our troopers were pointing and slashing; well, and of course at first I myself . . . What would you have! An enemy is an enemy. Yet a sort of sickening awe crept into my heart. There was no tumult—only a low deep murmur dwelt over them interspersed with louder cries and groans while that mob kept on pushing and surging past us, sightless and without feeling. A smell of scorched rags and festering wounds hung in the air. My horse staggered in the eddies of swaying men. But it was like cutting down galvanised corpses that didn't care. Invaders! Yes . . . God was already dealing with them.

'I touched my horse with the spurs to get clear. There was a sudden rush and a sort of angry moan when our second squadron got into them on our right. My horse plunged and somebody got hold of my leg. As I had no mind to get pulled out of the saddle I gave a backhanded slash without looking. I heard a cry and my leg was let go suddenly.

'Just then I caught sight of the subaltern of my troop at some little distance from me. His name was Tomassov. That multitude of resurrected bodies with glassy eyes was seething round his horse as if blind, growling crazily. He was sitting erect in his saddle not looking down at them and sheathing his sword deliberately.

'This Tomassov, well, he had a beard. Of course we all had beards then. Circumstances, lack of leisure, want of razors, too. No, seriously, we were a wild-looking lot in those unforgotten days which so many, so very many of us did not survive. You know our losses were awful, too. Yes, we looked wild. *Des Russes sauvages*—what!

'So he had a beard—this Tomassov I mean; but he did not look sauvage. He was the youngest of us all. And that meant real youth. At a distance he passed muster fairly well, what with the grime and the particular stamp of that campaign on our faces. But directly you were near enough to have a good look into his eyes, that was where his lack of age showed, though he was not exactly a boy.

'Those same eyes were blue, something like the blue of autumn skies, dreamy and gay, too—innocent believing eyes. A top-knot of fair hair decorated his brow like a gold diadem in what one would call normal times.

'You may think I am talking of him as if he were the hero of a novel. Why, that's nothing to what the adjutant discovered about him. He discovered that he had a "lover's lips"—whatever that may be. If the adjutant meant a nice mouth, why, it was nice enough, but of course it was intended for a sneer. That adjutant of ours was not a very delicate fellow. "Look at those lover's lips," he would exclaim in a loud tone while Tomassov was talking.

'Tomassov didn't quite like that sort of thing. But to a certain extent he had laid himself open to banter by the lasting character of his impressions which were connected with the passion of love and, perhaps, were not of such a rare kind as he seemed to think them. What made his comrades tolerant of his rhapsodies was the fact that they were connected with France, with Paris!

'You of the present generation, you cannot conceive how much prestige there was then in those names for the whole world. Paris was the centre of wonder for all human beings gifted with imagination. There we were, the majority of us young and well connected, but not long out of our hereditary nests in the provinces; simple servants of God; mere rustics, if I may say so. So we were only too ready to listen to the tales of France from our comrade Tomassov. He had been attached to our mission in Paris the year before the war. High protections very likely—or maybe sheer luck.

'I don't think he could have been a very useful member of the mission because of his youth and complete inexperience. And apparently all his time in Paris was his own. The use he made of it was to fall in love, to remain in that state, to cultivate it, to exist only for it in a manner of speaking.

'Thus it was something more than a mere memory that he had brought with him from France. Memory is a fugitive thing. It can be falsified, it can be effaced, it can be even doubted. Why! I myself come to doubt sometimes that I too have been in Paris in my turn. And the long road there with battles for its stages would appear still more incredible if it were not for a certain musket-ball which I have been carrying about my person ever since a little cavalry affair which hap-

pened in Silesia at the very beginning of the Leipsic campaign.

'Passages of love, however, are more impressive perhaps than passages of danger. You don't go affronting love in troops as it were. They are rarer, more personal and more intimate. And remember that with Tomassov all that was very fresh yet. He had not been home from France three months when the war began.

'His heart, his mind were full of that experience. He was really awed by it, and he was simple enough to let it appear in his speeches. He considered himself a sort of privileged person, not because a woman had looked at him with favour, but simply because, how shall I say it? he had had the wonderful illumination of his worship for her, as if it were Heaven itself that had done this for him.

'Oh yes, he was very simple. A nice youngster, yet no fool; and with that, utterly inexperienced, unsuspicious and unthinking. You will find one like that here and there in the provinces. He had some poetry in him, too. It could only be natural, something quite his own, not acquired. I suppose Father Adam had some poetry in him of that natural sort. For the rest un Russe sauvage as the French sometimes call us, but not of that kind which, they maintain, eats tallow candle for a delicacy. As to the woman, the Frenchwoman, well, though I have also been in France with a hundred thousand Russians, I have never seen her. Very likely she was not in Paris then. And in any case hers were not the doors that would fly open before simple fellows of my sort, you understand. Gilded salons were never in my way. I could not tell you how she looked, which is strange considering that I was, if I may say so, Tomassov's special confidant.

'He very soon got shy of talking before the others. I suppose the usual camp-fire comments jarred his fine feelings. But I was left to him and truly I had to submit. You can't very well expect a youngster in Tomassov's state to hold his tongue altogether; and I—I suppose you will hardly believe me—I am by nature a rather silent sort of person.

'Very likely my silence appeared to him sympathetic. All the month of September our regiment, quartered in villages, had come in for an easy time. It was then that I heard most of that—you can't call it a story. The story I have in my mind is not in that. Outpourings, let us call them.

'I would sit quite content to hold my peace, a whole hour perhaps, while Tomassov talked with exaltation. And when he was done I would

still hold my peace. And there would be produced a solemn effect of silence which, I imagine, pleased Tomassov in a way.

'She was of course not a woman in her first youth. A widow maybe. At any rate I never heard Tomassov mention her husband. She had a salon, something very distinguished; a social centre in which she

queened it with great splendour.

'Somehow, I fancy her court was composed mostly of men. But Tomassov, I must say, kept such details out of his discourses wonderfully well. Upon my word I don't know whether her hair was dark or fair, her eyes brown or blue; what was her stature, her features, or her complexion. His love soared above mere physical impressions. He never described her to me in set terms; but he was ready to swear that in her presence everybody's thoughts and feelings were bound to circle round her. She was that sort of woman. Most wonderful conversations on all sorts of subjects went on in her salon: but through them all there flowed unheard like a mysterious strain of music the assertion, the power, the tyranny of sheer beauty. So apparently the woman was beautiful. She detached all these talking people from their life interests, and even from their vanities. She was a secret delight and a secret trouble. All the men when they looked at her fell to brooding as if struck by the thought that their lives had been wasted. She was the very joy and shudder of felicity and she brought only sadness and torment to the hearts of men.

'In short, she must have been an extraordinary woman, or else Tomassov was an extraordinary young fellow to feel in that way and to talk like this about her. I told you the fellow had a lot of poetry in him, and observed that all this sounded true enough. It would be just about the sorcery a woman very much out of the common would exercise, you know. Poets do get close to truth somehow—there is no denying that.

'There is no poetry in my composition, I know, but I have my share of common shrewdness, and I have no doubt that the lady was kind to the youngster, once he did find his way inside her salon. His getting in is the real marvel. However, he did get in, the innocent, and he found himself in distinguished company there, amongst men of considerable position. And you know what that means: thick waists, bald heads, teeth that are not—as some satirist puts it. Imagine amongst them a nice boy, fresh and simple, like an apple just off the tree; a modest,

good-looking, impressionable, adoring young barbarian. My word! What a change! What a relief for jaded feelings! And with that, having in his nature that dose of poetry which saves even a simpleton from being a fool.

'He became an artlessly, unconditionally devoted slave. He was rewarded by being smiled on and in time admitted to the intimacy of the house. It may be that the unsophisticated young barbarian amused the exquisite lady. Perhaps—since he didn't feed on tallow candles—he satisfied some need of tenderness in the woman? You know, there are many kinds of tenderness highly civilised women are capable of. Women with heads and imagination, I mean, and no temperament to speak of, you understand. But who is going to fathom their needs or their fancies? Most of the time they themselves don't know much about their innermost moods, and blunder out of one into another, sometimes with catastrophic results. And then who is more surprised than they? However, Tomassov's case was in its nature quite idyllic. The fashionable world was amused. His devotion made for him a kind of social success. But he didn't care. There was his one divinity, and there was the shrine where he was permitted to go in and out without regard for official reception-hours.

'He took advantage of that privilege freely. Well, he had no official duties, you know. The Military Mission was supposed to be more complimentary than anything else, the head of it being a personal friend of our Emperor Alexander; and he too was laying himself out for successes in fashionable life exclusively—as it seemed. As it seemed.

'One afternoon Tomassov called on the mistress of his thoughts earlier than usual. She was not alone. There was a man with her, not one of the thick-waisted, bald-headed personages, but a somebody all the same, a man over thirty, a French officer who to some extent was also a privileged intimate. Tomassov was not jealous of him. Such a sentiment would have appeared presumptuous to the simple fellow.

'On the contrary, he admired that officer. You have no idea of the French military men's prestige in those days, even with us Russian soldiers who had managed to face them perhaps better than the rest. Victory had marked them on the forehead—it seemed for ever. They would have been more than human if they had not been conscious of it; but they were good comrades and had a sort of brotherly feeling for all who bore arms, even if it was against them.

'And this was quite a superior example, an officer of the Major-General's staff, and a man of the best society besides. He was powerfully built, and thoroughly masculine, though he was as carefully groomed as a woman. He had the courteous self-possession of a man of the world. His forehead, white as alabaster, contrasted impressively with the healthy colour of his face.

'I don't know whether he was jealous of Tomassov, but I suspect that he might have been a little annoyed at him as at a sort of walking absurdity of the sentimental order. But these men of the world are impenetrable and outwardly he condescended to recognise Tomassov's existence even more distinctly than was strictly necessary. Once or twice he had offered him some useful worldly advice with perfect tact and delicacy. Tomassov was completely conquered by that evidence of kindness under the cold polish of the best society.

'Tomassov, introduced into the petit salon, found these two exquisite people sitting on a sofa together and had the feeling of having interrupted some special conversation. They looked at him strangely, he thought; but he was not given to understand that he had intruded. After a time the lady said to the officer—his name was de Castel—"I wish you would take the trouble to ascertain the exact truth as to that rumour."

"It's much more than a mere rumour," remarked the officer. But he got up submissively and went out. The lady turned to Tomassov and said: "You may stay with me."

'This express command made him supremely happy, though as a

matter of fact he had had no idea of going.

'She regarded him with her kindly glances, which made something glow and expand within his chest. It was a delicious feeling, even though it did cut one's breath short now and then. Ecstatically he drank in the sound of her tranquil seductive talk full of innocent gaiety and of spiritual quietude. His passion appeared to him to flame up and envelop her in blue fiery tongues, from head to foot and over her head. while her soul reposed in the centre like a big white rose . . .

'H'm, good this. He told me many other things like that. But this is the one I remember. He himself remembered everything because these were the last memories of that woman. He was seeing her for the last time though he did not know it then.

'M. de Castel returned, breaking into that atmosphere of enchant-

ment Tomassov had been drinking in even to complete unconsciousness of the external world. Tomassov could not help being struck by the distinction of his movements, the ease of his manner, his superiority to all the other men he knew, and he suffered from it. It occurred to him that these two brilliant beings on the sofa were made for each other.

'De Castel, sitting down by the side of the lady, murmured to her discreetly, "There is not the slightest doubt that it's true," and they both turned their eyes to Tomassov. Roused thoroughly from his enchantment he became self-conscious; a feeling of shyness came over him. He sat smiling faintly at them.

'The lady, without taking her eyes off the blushing Tomassov, said

with a dreamy gravity quite unusual to her:

"I should like to know that your generosity can be supreme—without a flaw. Love at its highest should be the origin of every perfection."

'Tomassov opened his eyes wide with admiration at this, as though her lips had been dropping real pearls. The sentiment, however, was not uttered for the primitive Russian youth but for the exquisitely accomplished man of the world, de Castel.

'Tomassov could not see the effect it produced because the French officer lowered his head and sat there contemplating his admirably pol-

ished boots. The lady whispered in a sympathetic tone:

"You have scruples?"

'De Castel, without looking up, murmured: "It could be turned into a nice point of honour."

'She said vivaciously: "That surely is artificial. I am all for natural feelings. I believe in nothing else. But perhaps your conscience . . ."

'He interrupted her: "Not at all. My conscience is not childish. The fate of those people is of no military importance to us. What can it matter? The fortune of France is invincible."

"Well then ..." she uttered meaningly, and rose from the couch. The French officer stood up too. Tomassov hastened to follow their example. He was pained by his state of utter mental darkness. While he was raising the lady's white hand to his lips he heard the French officer say with marked emphasis:

"If he has the soul of a warrior" (at that time, you know, people really talked in that way), "if he has the soul of a warrior he ought to fall at your feet in gratitude."

'Tomassov felt himself plunged into even denser darkness than

before. He followed the French officer out of the room and out of the house; for he had a notion that this was expected of him.

'It was getting dusk, the weather was very bad, and the street was quite deserted. The Frenchman lingered in it strangely. And Tomassov lingered too without impatience. He was never in a hurry to get away from the house in which she lived. And besides, something wonderful had happened to him. The hand he had reverently raised by the tips of its fingers had been pressed against his lips. He had received a secret favour! He was almost frightened. The world had reeled—and it had hardly steadied itself yet. De Castel stopped short at the corner of the quiet street.

"I don't care to be seen too much with you in the lighted thoroughfares, M. Tomassov," he said in a strangely grim tone.

""Why?" asked the young man, too startled to be offended.

"From prudence," answered the other curtly. "So we will have to part here; but before we part I'll disclose to you something of which

you will see at once the importance."

'This, please note, was an evening in late March of the year 1812. For a long time already there had been talk of a growing coolness between Russia and France. The word "war" was being whispered in drawing-rooms louder and louder, and at last was heard in official circles. Thereupon the Parisian police discovered that our military envoy had corrupted some clerks at the Ministry of War and had obtained from them some very important confidential documents. The wretched men (there were two of them) had confessed their crime and were to be shot that night. Tomorrow all the town would be talking of the affair. But the worst was that the Emperor Napoleon was furiously angry at the discovery, and had made up his mind to have the Russian envoy arrested.

'Such was de Castel's disclosure; and though he had spoken in low tones Tomassov was stunned as by a great crash.

"Arrested," he murmured desolately.

"Yes, and kept as a state prisoner—with everybody belonging to him . . ."

'The French officer seized Tomassov's arm above the elbow and pressed it hard.

"And kept in France," he repeated into Tomassov's very ear, and then letting him go stepped back a space and remained silent. "And it's you, you, who are telling me this!" cried Tomassov in an extremity of gratitude that was hardly greater than his admiration for the generosity of his future foe. Could a brother have done for him more! He sought to seize the hand of the French officer, but the latter remained wrapped up closely in his cloak. Possibly in the dark he had not noticed the attempt. He moved back a bit and in his self-possessed voice of a man of the world, as though he were speaking across a cardtable or something of the sort, he called Tomassov's attention to the fact that if he meant to make use of the warning the moments were precious.

"Indeed they are," agreed the awed Tomassov. "Goodbye then. I have no word of thanks to equal your generosity; but if ever I have an

opportunity, I swear it, you may command my life . . ."

'But the Frenchman retreated, had already vanished in the dark lonely street. Tomassov was alone and then he did not waste any of the precious minutes of that night.

'See how people's mere gossip and idle talk pass into history. In all the memoirs of the time, if you read them, you will find it stated that our envoy had a warning from some highly placed woman who was in love with him. Of course it's known that he had successes with women, and in the highest spheres too, but the truth is that the person who warned him was no other than our simple Tomassov—an altogether different sort of lover from himself.

'This then is the secret of our Emperor's representative's escape from arrest. He and all his official household got out of France all

right—as history records.

'And amongst that household there was our Tomassov of course. He had, in the words of the French officer, the soul of a warrior. And what more desolate prospect for a man with such a soul than to be imprisoned on the eve of war; to be cut off from his country in danger, from his military family, from his duty, from honour, and—well—from glory too.

'Tomassov used to shudder at the mere thought of the moral torture he had escaped; and he nursed in his heart a boundless gratitude to the two people who had saved him from that cruel ordeal. They were wonderful! For him love and friendship were but two aspects of exalted perfection. He had found these fine examples of it and he vowed them indeed a sort of cult. It affected his attitude towards Frenchmen in general, great patriot as he was. He was naturally indignant at the invasion of his country, but this indignation had no personal animosity in it. His was fundamentally a fine nature. He grieved at the appalling amount of human suffering he saw around him. Yes, he was full of compassion for all forms of mankind's misery in a manly way.

'Less fine natures than his own did not understand this very well. In

the regiment they had nicknamed him the Humane Tomassov.

'He didn't take offence at it. There is nothing incompatible between humanity and a warrior's soul. People without compassion are the civilians, Government officials, merchants and suchlike. As to the ferocious talk one hears from a lot of decent people in wartime—well, the tongue is an unruly member at best, and when there is some excitement going on there is no curbing its furious activity.

'So I had not been very surprised to see our Tomassov sheathe deliberately his sword right in the middle of that charge, you may say. As we rode away after it he was very silent. He was not a chatterer as a rule, but it was evident that this close view of the Grand Army had affected him deeply, like some sight not of this earth. I had always been a pretty tough individual myself—well, even I... and there was that fellow with a lot of poetry in his nature! You may imagine what he made of it to himself. We rode side by side without opening our lips. It was simply beyond words.

'We established our bivouac along the edge of the forest so as to get some shelter for our horses. However, the boisterous north wind had dropped as quickly as it had sprung up, and the great winter stillness lay on the land from the Baltic to the Black Sea. One could almost feel its cold, lifeless immensity reaching up to the stars.

'Our men had lighted several fires for their officers and had cleared the snow around them. We had big logs of wood for seats; it was a very tolerable bivouac upon the whole, even without the exultation of victory. We were to feel that later, but at present we were oppressed by our stern and arduous task.

'There were three of us round my fire. The third one was that adjutant. He was perhaps a well-meaning chap but not so nice as he might have been had he been less rough in manner and less crude in his perceptions. He would reason about people's conduct as though a man were as simple a figure as, say, two sticks laid across each other; whereas a man is much more like the sea whose movements are too complicated





to explain, and whose depths may bring up God only knows what at any moment.

'We talked a little about that charge. Not much. That sort of thing does not lend itself to conversation. Tomassov muttered a few words about a mere butchery. I had nothing to say. As I told you I had very soon let my sword hang idle at my wrist. That starving mob had not even *tried* to defend itself. Just a few shots. We had two men wounded. Two! . . . and we had charged the main column of Napoleon's Grand Army.

'Tomassov muttered wearily: "What was the good of it?" I did not wish to argue, so I only just mumbled: "Ah, well!" But the adjutant struck in unpleasantly:

"Why, it warmed the men a bit. It has made me warm. That's a good enough reason. But our Tomassov is so humane! And besides he has been in love with a Frenchwoman, and thick as thieves with a lot of Frenchmen, so he is sorry for them. Never mind, my boy, we are on the Paris road now and you shall soon see her!" This was one of his usual, as we believed them, foolish speeches. None of us but believed that the getting to Paris would be a matter of years—of years. And lo! less than eighteen months afterwards I was rooked of a lot of money in a gambling hell in the Palais Royal.

'Truth, being often the most senseless thing in the world, is sometimes revealed to fools. I don't think that adjutant of ours believed in his own words. He just wanted to tease Tomassov from habit. Purely from habit. We of course said nothing, and so he took his head in his hands and fell into a doze as he sat on a log in front of the fire.

'Our cavalry was on the extreme right wing of the army, and I must confess that we guarded it very badly. We had lost all sense of insecurity by this time; but still we did keep up a pretence of doing it in a way. Presently a trooper rode up leading a horse, and Tomassov mounted stiffly and went off on a round of the outposts. Of the perfectly useless outposts.

'The night was still, except for the crackling of the fires. The raging wind had lifted far above the earth and not the faintest breath of it could be heard. Only the full moon swam out with a rush into the sky and suddenly hung high and motionless overhead. I remember raising my hairy face to it for a moment. Then, I verily believe, I dozed off too, bent double on my log with my head towards the fierce blaze.

'You know what an impermanent thing such slumber is. One moment you drop into an abyss and the next you are back in the world that you would think too deep for any noise but the trumpet of the Last Judgement. And then off you go again. Your very soul seems to slip down into a bottomless black pit. Then up once more into a startled consciousness. A mere plaything of cruel sleep one is, then. Tormented both ways.

'However, when my orderly appeared before me, repeating: "Won't your Honour be pleased to eat?... Won't your Honour be pleased to eat?..." I managed to keep my hold of it—I mean that gaping consciousness. He was offering me a sooty pot containing some grain boiled in water with a pinch of salt. A wooden spoon was stuck in it.

'At that time these were the only rations we were getting regularly. Mere chicken food, confound it! But the Russian soldier is wonderful. Well, my fellow waited till I had feasted and then went away carrying off

the empty pot.

'I was no longer sleepy. Indeed, I had become awake with an exaggerated mental consciousness of existence extending beyond my immediate surroundings. Those are but exceptional moments with mankind, I am glad to say. I had the intimate sensation of the earth in all its enormous expanse wrapped in snow, with nothing showing on it but trees with their straight stalk-like trunks and their funeral verdure; and in this aspect of general mourning I seemed to hear the sighs of mankind falling to die in the midst of a Nature without life. They were Frenchmen. We didn't hate them; they did not hate us; we had existed far apart—and suddenly they had come rolling in with arms in their hands, without fear of God, carrying with them other nations, and all to perish together in a long, long trail of frozen corpses. I had an actual vision of that trail: a pathetic multitude of small dark mounds stretching away under the moonlight in a clear, still, and pitiless atmosphere—a sort of horrible peace.

'But what other peace could there be for them? What else did they deserve? I don't know by what connection of emotions there came into my head the thought that the earth was a pagan planet and not a fit abode for Christian virtues.

'You may be surprised that I should remember all this so well. What is a passing emotion or half-formed thought to last in so many years of a man's changing inconsequential life? But what has fixed the emotion

of that evening in my recollection so that the slightest shadows remain indelible was an event of strange finality, an event not likely to be forgotten in a lifetime—as you shall see.

'I don't suppose I had been entertaining those thoughts more than five minutes when something induced me to look over my shoulder. I can't think it was a noise; the snow deadened all the sounds. Something it must have been, some sort of signal reaching my consciousness. Anyway, I turned my head, and there was the event approaching me, not that I knew it or had the slightest premonition. All I saw in the distance were two figures approaching in the moonlight. One of them was our Tomassov. The dark mass behind him which moved across my sight were the horses which his orderly was leading away. Tomassov was a very familiar appearance, in long boots, a tall figure ending in a pointed hood. But by his side advanced another figure. I mistrusted my eyes at first. It was amazing! It had a shining crested helmet on its head and was muffled up in a white cloak. The cloak was not as white as snow. Nothing in the world is. It was white more like mist, with an aspect that was ghostly and martial, to an extraordinary degree. It was as if Tomassov had got hold of the God of War himself. I could see at once that he was leading this resplendent vision by the arm. Then I saw that he was holding it up. While I stared and stared, they crept on—for indeed they were creeping—and at last they crept into the light of our bivouac fire and passed beyond the log I was sitting on. The blaze played on the helmet. It was extremely battered and the frost-bitten face, full of sores, under it was framed in bits of mangy fur. No God of War this, but a French officer. The great white cuirassier's cloak was torn, burnt full of holes. His feet were wrapped up in old sheepskins over remnants of boots. They looked monstrous and he tottered on them, sustained by Tomassov, who lowered him most carefully on to the log on which I sat.

'My amazement knew no bounds.

"You have brought in a prisoner," I said to Tomassov, as if I could not believe my eyes.

'You must understand that unless they surrendered in large bodies we made no prisoners. What would have been the good? Our Cossacks either killed the stragglers or else let them alone, just as it happened. It came really to the same thing in the end.

"Tomassov turned to me with a very troubled look.

"He sprang up from the ground somewhere as I was leaving the

outpost," he said. "I believe he was making for it, for he walked blindly into my horse. He got hold of my leg and of course none of our chaps dared touch him then."

"He had a narrow escape," I said.

"He didn't appreciate it," said Tomassov, looking even more troubled than before. "He came along holding to my stirrup-leather. That's what made me so late. He told me he was a staff officer; and then talking in a voice such, I suppose, as the damned alone use, a croaking of rage and pain, he said he had a favour to beg of me. A supreme favour. Did I understand him? he asked in a sort of fiendish whisper.

"Of course I told him that I did. I said: "Oui, je vous comprends."

"" 'Then', said he, 'do it. Now! At once—in the pity of your heart."

'Tomassov ceased and stared queerly at me above the head of the prisoner.

'I said, "What did he mean?"

"That's what I asked him," answered Tomassov in a dazed tone, "and he said that he wanted me to do him the favour to blow his brains out. As a fellow soldier," he said. "As a man of feeling—as—as a humane man."

'The prisoner sat between us like an awful gashed mummy as to the face, a martial scarecrow, a grotesque horror of rags and dirt, with awful living eyes, full of vitality, full of unquenchable fire, in a body of horrible affliction, a skeleton at the feast of glory. And suddenly those shining unextinguishable eyes of his became fixed upon Tomassov. He, poor fellow, fascinated, returned the ghastly stare of a suffering soul in that mere husk of a man. The prisoner croaked at him in French.

"I recognise, you know. You are her Russian youngster. You were very grateful. I call on you to pay the debt. Pay it, I say, with one liberating shot. You are a man of honour. I have not even a broken sabre. All my being recoils from my own degradation. You know me."

'Tomassov said nothing.

"Haven't you got the soul of a warrior?" the Frenchman asked in an angry whisper, but with something of a mocking intention in it.

"I don't know," said poor Tomassov.

'What a look of contempt that scarecrow gave him out of his unquenchable eyes! He seemed to live only by the force of infuriated and impotent despair. Suddenly he gave a gasp and fell forward writhing in the agony of cramp in all his limbs; a not unusual effect of the heat of a camp-fire. It resembled the application of some horrible torture. But he tried to fight against the pain at first. He only moaned low while we bent over him so as to prevent him rolling into the fire, and muttered feverishly at intervals: "Tuez moi, tuez moi . . ." till vanquished by the pain he screamed in agony, time after time, each cry bursting out through his compressed lips.

'The adjutant woke up on the other side of the fire and started

swearing awfully at the beastly row that Frenchman was making.

"What's this? More of your infernal humanity, Tomassov," he yelled at us. "Why don't you have him thrown out of this to the devil on the snow?"

'As we paid no attention to his shouts, he got up, cursing shockingly, and went away to another fire. Presently the French officer became easier. We propped him up against the log and sat silent on each side of him till the bugles started their call at the first break of day. The big flame, kept up all through the night, paled on the livid sheet of snow, while the frozen air all round rang with the brazen notes of cavalry trumpets. The Frenchman's eyes, fixed in a glassy stare, which for a moment made us hope that he had died quietly sitting there between us two, stirred slowly to right and left, looking at each of our faces in turn. Tomassov and I exchanged glances of dismay. Then de Castel's voice, unexpected in its renewed strength and ghastly self-possession, made us shudder inwardly.

"Bonjour, messieurs."

'His chin dropped on his breast. Tomassov addressed me in Russian.

"It is he, the man himself . . ." I nodded and Tomassov went on in a tone of anguish: "Yes, he! Brilliant, accomplished, envied by men, loved by that woman—this horror—this miserable thing that cannot die. Look at his eyes. It's terrible."

'I did not look, but I understood what Tomassov meant. We could do nothing for him. This avenging winter of fate held both the fugitives and the pursuers in its iron grip. Compassion was but a vain word before that unrelenting destiny. I tried to say something about a convoy being no doubt collected in the village—but I faltered at the mute glance Tomassov gave me. We knew what those convoys were like: appalling mobs of hopeless wretches driven on by the butts of Cossacks' lances, back to the frozen inferno, with their faces set away from their homes.

'Our two squadrons had been formed along the edge of the forest. The minutes of anguish were passing. The Frenchman suddenly struggled up to his feet. We helped him almost without knowing what we were doing.

"Come," he said, in measured tones. "This is the moment." He paused for a long time, then with the same distinctness went on: "On

my word of honour, all faith is dead in me."

'His voice lost suddenly its self-possession. After waiting a little while he added in a murmur—"And even my courage... Upon my honour."

'Another long pause ensued before with a great effort he whispered hoarsely: "Isn't this enough to move a heart of stone? Am I to go on my knees to you?"

'Again a deep silence fell upon the three of us. Then the French

officer flung his last word of anger at Tomassov.

""Milksop!"

'Not a feature of the poor fellow moved. I made up my mind to go and fetch a couple of our troopers to lead that miserable prisoner away to the village. There was nothing else for it. I had not moved six paces towards the group of horses and orderlies in front of our squadron when... but you have guessed it. Of course. And I too, I guessed it, for I give you my word that the report of Tomassov's pistol was the most insignificant thing imaginable. The snow certainly does absorb sound. It was a mere feeble pop. Of the orderlies holding our horses I don't think one turned his head round.

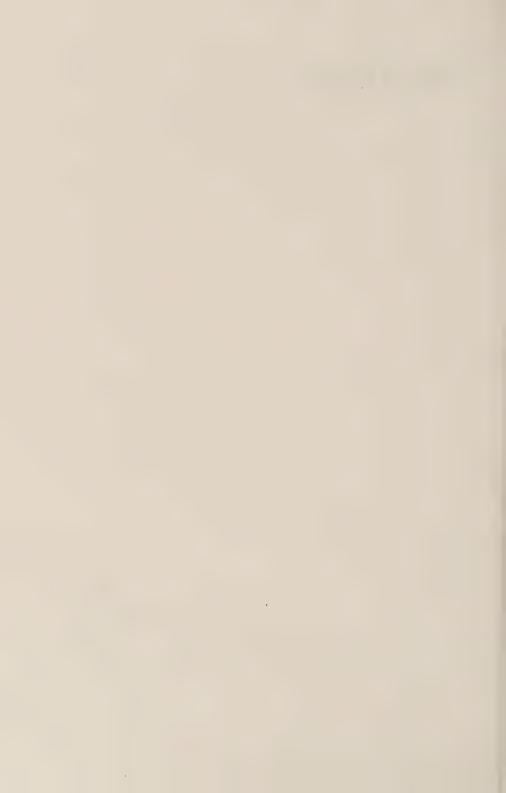
'Yes. Tomassov had done it. Destiny had led that de Castel to the man who could understand him perfectly. But it was poor Tomassov's lot to be the predestined victim. You know what the world's justice and mankind's judgement are like. They fell heavily on him with a sort of inverted hypocrisy. Why! That brute of an adjutant, himself, was the first to set going horrified allusions to the shooting of a prisoner in cold blood! Tomassov was not dismissed from the service, of course. But after the siege of Dantzig he asked for permission to resign from the army, and went away to bury himself in the depths of his province, where a vague story of some dark deed clung to him for years.

'Yes. He had done it. And what was it? One warrior's soul paying

its debt a hundredfold to another warrior's soul by releasing it from a fate worse than death—the loss of all faith and courage. You may look on it in that way. I don't know. And perhaps poor Tomassov did not know himself. But I was the first to approach that appalling dark group on the snow: the Frenchman extended rigidly on his back, Tomassov kneeling on one knee rather nearer to the feet than to the Frenchman's head. He had taken his cap off and his hair shone like gold in the light drift of flakes that had begun to fall. He was stooping over the dead in a tenderly contemplative attitude. And his young, ingenuous face with lowered eyelids, expressed no grief, no sternness, no horror—but was set in the repose of a profound, as if endless and endlessly silent meditation.'



## Prince Roman



'Events which happened seventy years ago are perhaps rather too far off to be dragged aptly into a mere conversation. Of course the year 1831 is for us an historical date, one of these fatal years when in the presence of the world's passive indignation and eloquent sympathies we had once more to murmur "Vae Victis" and count the cost in sorrow. Not that we were ever very good at calculating, either in prosperity or in adversity. That's a lesson we could never learn, to the great exasperation of our enemies who have bestowed upon us the epithet of Incorrigible . . . '

The speaker was of Polish nationality, that nationality not so much alive as surviving, which persists in thinking, breathing, speaking, hoping and suffering in its grave, railed in by a million of bayonets and triple-sealed with the seals of three great empires.

The conversation was about aristocracy. How did this, nowadays discredited, subject come up? It is some years ago now and the precise recollection has faded. But I remember that it was not considered practically as an ingredient in the social mixture; and I verily believed that we arrived at that subject through some exchange of ideas about patriotism—a somewhat discredited sentiment, because the delicacy of our humanitarians regards it as a relic of barbarism. Yet neither the great Florentine painter who closed his eyes in death thinking of his city, nor St Francis blessing with his last breath the town of Assisi, were barbarians. It requires a certain greatness of soul to interpret patriotism worthily—or else a sincerity of feeling denied to the vulgar refinement of modern thought which cannot understand the august simplicity of a sentiment proceeding from the very nature of things and men.

The aristocracy we were talking about was the very highest, the great families of Europe, not impoverished, not converted, not liberalised, the most distinctive and specialised class of all classes, for which even ambition itself does not exist among the usual incentives to activity and regulators of conduct.

The undisputed right of leadership having passed away from them, we judged that their great fortunes, their cosmopolitanism, brought about by wide alliances, their elevated station, in which there is so little to gain and so much to lose, must make their position difficult in times of political commotion or national upheaval. No longer born to command—which is the very essence of aristocracy—it becomes difficult

for them to do aught else but hold aloof from the great movements of

popular passion.

We had reached that conclusion when the remark about far-off events was made and the date of 1831 mentioned. And the speaker continued:—

I don't mean to say that I knew Prince Roman at that remote time. I begin to feel pretty ancient, but I am not so ancient as that. In fact Prince Roman was married the very year my father was born. It was in 1828; the nineteenth century was young yet and the Prince was even younger than the century, but I don't know exactly by how much. In any case his was an early marriage. It was an ideal alliance from every point of view. The girl was young and beautiful, an orphan heiress of a great name and of a great fortune. The Prince, then an officer in the Guards and distinguished amongst his fellows by something reserved and reflective in his character, had fallen headlong in love with her beauty, her charm and the serious qualities of her mind and heart. He was a rather silent young man; but his glances, his bearing, his whole person expressed his absolute devotion to the woman of his choice, a devotion which she returned in her own frank and fascinating manner.

The flame of this pure young passion promised to burn for ever; and for a season it lit up the dry, cynical atmosphere of the great world of St Petersburg. The Emperor Nicholas himself, the grandfather of the present man, the one who died from the Crimean war, the last perhaps of the Autocrats with a mystical belief in the Divine character of his mission, showed some interest in this pair of married lovers. It is true that Nicholas kept a watchful eye on all the doings of the great Polish nobles. The young people leading a life appropriate to their station were obviously wrapped up in each other; and society, fascinated by the sincerity of a feeling moving serenely among the artificialities of its anxious and fastidious agitation, watched them with benevolent indulgence and an amused tenderness.

The marriage was the social event of 1828 in the capital. Just forty years afterwards I was staying in the country house of my mother's brother in our southern provinces.

It was the dead of winter. The great lawn in front was as pure and smooth as an Alpine snowfield, a white and feathery level sparkling under the sun as if sprinkled with diamond-dust, declining gently to the lake—a long, sinuous piece of frozen water looking bluish and more solid than the earth. A cold brilliant sun glided low above an undulating horizon of great folds of snow in which the villages of Ukrainian peasants remained out of sight, like clusters of boats hidden in the hollows of a running sea. And everything was very still.

I don't know now how I had managed to escape at eleven o'clock in the morning from the schoolroom. I was a boy of eight, the little girl, my cousin, a few months younger than myself, though hereditarily more quick-tempered, was less adventurous. So I had escaped alone; and presently I found myself in the great stone-paved hall, warmed by a monumental stove of white tiles, a much more pleasant locality than the schoolroom which for some reason or other, perhaps hygienic, was always kept at a low temperature.

We children were aware that there was a guest staying in the house. He had arrived the night before just as we were being driven off to bed. We broke back through the line of beaters to rush and flatten our noses against the dark window-panes; but we were too late to see him alight. We had only watched in a ruddy glare the big travelling carriage on sleigh-runners harnessed with six horses, a black mass against the snow, going off to the stables, preceded by a horseman carrying a blazing ball of tow and resin in an iron basket at the end of a long stick swung from his saddle-bow. Two stable-boys had been sent out early in the afternoon along the snow-tracks to meet the expected guest at dusk and light his way with these road torches. At that time, you must remember, there was not a single mile of railways in our southern provinces. My little cousin and I had no knowledge of trains and engines, except from picture-books, as of things rather vague, extremely remote, and not particularly interesting unless to grown-ups who travelled abroad.

Our notion of princes, perhaps a little more precise, was mainly literary and had a glamour reflected from the light of fairy-tales, in which princes always appear young, charming, heroic and fortunate. Yet, as well as any other children, we could draw a firm line between the real and the ideal. We knew that princes were historical personages. And there was some glamour in that fact too. But what had driven me to roam cautiously over the house like an escaped prisoner was the hope of snatching an interview with a special friend of mine, the head forester, who generally came to make his report at that time of the day. I yearned for news of a certain wolf. You know, in a country where

wolves are to be found, every winter almost brings forward an individual eminent by the audacity of his misdeeds, by his more perfect wolfishness, so to speak. I wanted to hear some new thrilling tale of that wolf—perhaps the dramatic story of his death . . .

But there was no one in the hall.

Deceived in my hopes I became suddenly very much depressed. Unable to slip back in triumph to my studies I elected to stroll spirit-lessly into the billiard-room where certainly I had no business. There was no one there either, and I felt very lost and desolate under its high ceiling, all alone with the massive English billiard-table which seemed, in heavy, rectilinear silence, to disapprove of that small boy's intrusion.

As I began to think of retreat I heard footsteps in the adjoining drawing-room; and, before I could turn tail and flee, my uncle and his guest appeared in the doorway. To run away after having been seen would have been highly improper, so I stood my ground. My uncle looked surprised to see me; the guest by his side was a spare man, of average stature, buttoned up in a black frock-coat and holding himself very erect with a stiffly soldier-like carriage. From the folds of a soft white cambric neckcloth peeped the points of a collar close against each shaven cheek. A few wisps of thin grey hair were brushed smoothly across the top of his bald head. His face, which must have been beautiful in its day, had preserved in age the harmonious simplicity of its lines. What amazed me was its even, almost deathlike pallor. He seemed to me to be prodigiously old. A faint smile, a mere momentary alteration in the set of his thin lips acknowledged my blushing confusion; and I became greatly interested to see him reach into the inside breast-pocket of his coat. He extracted therefrom a lead pencil and a block of detachable pages, which he handed to my uncle with an almost imperceptible bow.

I was very much astonished, but my uncle received it as a matter of course. He wrote something at which the other glanced and nodded slightly. A thin wrinkled hand—the hand was older than the face—patted my cheek and then rested on my head lightly. An unringing voice, a voice as colourless as the face itself, issued from his sunken lips, while the eyes, dark and still, looked down at me kindly.

'And how old is this shy little boy?'

Before I could answer my uncle wrote down my age on the pad. I was deeply impressed. What was this ceremony? Was this personage

too great to be spoken to? Again he glanced at the pad, and again gave a nod, and again that impersonal, mechanical voice was heard—'He resembles his grandfather.'

I remembered my paternal grandfather. He had died not long before. He, too, was prodigiously old. And to me it seemed perfectly natural that two such ancient and venerable persons should have known each other in the dim ages of creation before my birth. But my uncle obviously had not been aware of the fact. So obviously that the mechanical voice explained.

—'Yes, yes. Comrades in '31. He was one of those who knew. Old times, my dear sir, old times . . .'

He made a gesture as if to put aside an importunate ghost. And now they were both looking down at me. I wondered whether anything was expected from me. To my round, questioning eyes my uncle remarked, 'He's completely deaf.' And the unrelated, inexpressive voice said—'Give me your hand.'

Acutely conscious of inky fingers I put it out timidly. I had never seen a deaf person before and was rather startled. He pressed it firmly and then gave me a final pat on the head.

My uncle addressed me weightily.

— 'You have shaken hands with Prince Roman S——. It's something for you to remember when you grow up.'

I was impressed by his tone. I had enough historical information to know vaguely that the Princes S—— counted amongst the sovereign Princes of Ruthenia till the union of all Ruthenian lands to the kingdom of Poland, when they became great Polish magnates, sometime at the beginning of the fifteenth century. But what concerned me most was the failure of the fairy-tale glamour. It was shocking to discover a prince who was deaf, bald, meagre, and so prodigiously old. It never occurred to me that this imposing and disappointing man had been young, rich, beautiful. I could not know that he had been happy in the felicity of an ideal marriage uniting two young hearts, two great names and two great fortunes; happy with a happiness which, as in fairy-tales, seemed destined to last for ever . . .

But it did not last for ever. It was fated not to last very long even by the measure of the days allotted to men's passage on this earth, where enduring happiness is only found in the conclusion of fairy-tales. A daughter was born to them and shortly afterwards the health of the young princess began to fail. For a time she bore up with smiling intrepidity, sustained by the feeling that now her existence was necessary for the happiness of two lives. But at last the husband, thoroughly alarmed by the rapid changes in her appearance, obtained an unlimited leave and took her away from the capital, to his parents in the country.

The old prince and princess were extremely frightened at the state of their beloved daughter-in-law. Preparations were at once made for a journey abroad. But it seemed as if it were already too late; and the invalid herself opposed the project with gentle obstinacy. Thin and pale in the great armchair, where the insidious and obscure nervous malady made her appear smaller and more frail every day without effacing the smile of her eyes or the charming grace of her wasted face, she clung to her native land and wished to breathe her native air. Nowhere else could she expect to get well so quickly, nowhere else would it be so easy for her to die.

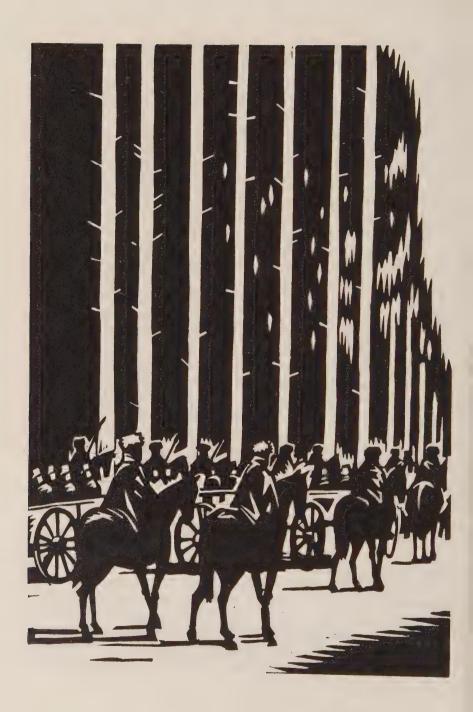
She died before her little girl was two years old. The grief of the husband was terrible and the more alarming to his parents because perfectly silent and dry-eyed. After the funeral, while the immense bareheaded crowd of peasants surrounding the private chapel in the grounds was dispersing, the Prince, waving away his friends and relations, remained alone to watch the masons of the estate closing the family vault. When the last stone was in position he uttered a groan, the first sound of pain which had escaped from him for days, and walking away with lowered head shut himself up again in his apartments.

His father and mother feared for his reason. His outward tranquillity was appalling to them. They had nothing to trust to but that very youth which made his despair so self-absorbed and so intense. Old Prince John, fretful and anxious, repeated, 'Poor Roman should be roused somehow. He's so young.' But they could find nothing to rouse him with. And the old princess, wiping her eyes, wished in her heart he were

young enough to come and cry at her knee.

In time Prince Roman, making an effort, would join now and again the family circle. But it was as if his heart and his mind had been buried in the family vault with the wife he had lost. He took to wandering in the woods with a gun, watched over secretly by one of the keepers, who would report in the evening that 'His Serenity has never fired a shot all day.' Sometimes walking to the stables in the morning he would order in subdued tones a horse to be saddled, wait switching his boot till it





was led up to him, then mount without a word and ride out of the gates at a walking pace. He would be gone all day. People saw him on the roads looking neither to the right nor to the left, white-faced, sitting rigidly in the saddle like a horseman of stone on a living mount.

The peasants working in the fields, the great unhedged fields, looked after him from the distance; and sometimes some sympathetic old woman on the threshold of a low, thatched hut was moved to make the sign of the cross in the air behind his back; as though he were one of themselves, a simple village soul struck by a sore affliction.

He rode looking straight ahead, seeing no one, as if the earth were empty and all mankind buried in that grave which had opened so suddenly in his path to swallow up his happiness. What were men to him with their sorrows, joys, labours and passions, from which she who had been all the world to him had been cut off so early?

They did not exist; and he would have felt as completely lonely and abandoned as a man in the toils of a cruel nightmare if it had not been for this countryside where he had been born and had spent his happy boyish years. He knew it well—every slight rise crowned with trees amongst the ploughed fields, every dell concealing a village. The dammed streams made a chain of lakes set in the green meadows. Far away to the north the great Lithuanian forest faced the sun, no higher than a hedge; and to the south, the way to the plains, the vast brown spaces of the earth touched the blue sky.

And this familiar landscape associated with the days without thought and without sorrow, this land the charm of which he felt without even looking at it, soothed his pain, like the presence of an old friend who sits silent and disregarded by one in some dark hour of life.

One afternoon, it happened that the Prince, after turning his horse's head for home, remarked a low dense cloud of dark dust cutting off slantwise a part of the view. He reined in on a knoll and peered. There were slender gleams of steel here and there in that cloud, and it contained moving forms which revealed themselves at last as a long line of peasant carts full of soldiers, moving slowly in double file under the escort of mounted Cossacks.

It was like an immense reptile creeping over the fields; its head dipped out of sight in a slight hollow and its tail went on writhing and growing shorter as though the monster were eating its way slowly into the very heart of the land.

The Prince directed his way through a village lying a little off the track. The roadside inn with its stable, byre and barn under one enormous thatched roof resembled a deformed, hunchbacked, ragged giant, sprawling amongst the small huts of the peasants. The innkeeper, a portly, dignified Jew, clad in a black satin coat reaching down to his heels and girt with a red sash, stood at the door stroking his long silvery beard.

He watched the Prince approach and bowed gravely from the waist, not expecting to be noticed even, since it was well known that their young lord had no eyes for anything or anybody in his grief. It was quite a shock for him when the Prince pulled up and asked:—'What's all this, Yankel?'—'That is, please your Serenity, that is a convoy of foot-soldiers; they are hurrying down to the south.'

He glanced right and left cautiously, but as there was no one near but some children playing in the dust of the village street, he came up close

to the stirrup.

— 'Doesn't your Serenity know? It has begun already down there. All the landowners great and small are out in arms, and even the common people have risen. Only yesterday the saddler from Grodek (it was a tiny market-town near by) went through here with his two apprentices on his way to join. He left even his cart with me. I gave him a guide through our neighbourhood. You know, your Serenity, our people they travel a lot and they see all that's going on, and they know all the roads.'

He tried to keep down his excitement, for the Jew Yankel, innkeeper and tenant of all the mills on the estate, was a Polish patriot. And in a

still lower voice:

—'I was already a married man when the French and all the other nations passed this way with Napoleon. *Tse! Tse!* That was a great harvest for death. *Nu!* Perhaps this time God will help.'

The Prince nodded. 'Perhaps'—and falling into deep meditation he let his horse take him home.

That night he wrote a letter and early in the morning sent a mounted express to the post-town. During the day he came out of his taciturnity, to the great joy of the family circle, and conversed with his father of recent events—the revolt in Warsaw, the flight of the Grand Duke Constantine, the first slight successes of the Polish army (at that time there was a Polish army), the risings in the provinces. Old Prince John, moved and uneasy, speaking from a purely aristocratic point of view,

mistrusted the popular origins of the movement, regretted its democratic tendencies, and did not believe in the possibility of success.

He was sad, inwardly agitated.

—'I am judging all this calmly. There are secular principles of legitimity and order which have been violated in this reckless enterprise for the sake of most subversive illusions. Though of course the patriotic impulses of the heart . . .'

Prince Roman had listened in a thoughtful attitude. He took advantage of the pause to tell his father quietly that he had sent that morning a letter to St Petersburg resigning his commission in the Guards.

The old prince remained silent. He thought that he ought to have been consulted. His son was also ordnance officer to the Emperor and he knew that the Tsar would never forget this appearance of defection in a Polish noble. In a discontented tone he pointed out to his son that as it was he had an unlimited leave. The right thing would have been to keep quiet. They had too much tact at Court to recall a man of his name. Or at worst some distant mission might have been asked for—to the Caucasus for instance—away from this unhappy struggle which was wrong in principle and therefore destined to fail.

'Presently you shall find yourself without any interest in life and with no occupation. And you shall need something to occupy you, my poor boy. You have acted rashly, I fear.'

Prince Roman murmured.

'I thought it better.'

His father faltered under his steady gaze.

—'Well, well—perhaps! But as ordnance officer to the Emperor and in favour with all the Imperial family . . .'

— 'Those people had never been heard of when our house was already illustrious,' the young man let fall disdainfully.

This was the sort of remark to which the old prince was sensible.

"Well—perhaps it is better,' he conceded at last.

The father and son parted affectionately for the night. The next day Prince Roman seemed to have fallen back into the depths of his indifference. He rode out as usual. He remembered that the day before he had seen a reptile-like convoy of soldiery bristling with bayonets crawling over the face of that land which was his. The woman he loved had been his too. Death had robbed him of her. Her loss had been to him a moral shock. It had opened his heart to a greater sorrow, his mind to a

vaster thought, his eyes to all the past, and to the existence of another love fraught with pain but as mysteriously imperative as that lost one to which he had entrusted his happiness.

That evening he retired earlier than usual and rang for his personal

servant.

—'Go and see if there is light yet in the quarters of the Master-ofthe-Horse. If he is still up ask him to come and speak to me.'

While the servant was absent on this errand the Prince tore up hastily some papers, locked the drawers of his desk, and hung a medallion containing the miniature of his wife round his neck against his breast.

The man the Prince was expecting belonged to that past which the death of his love had called to life. He was of a family of small nobles who for generations had been adherents, servants and friends of the Princes S——. He remembered the times before the last partition, and had taken part in the struggles of the last hour. He was a typical old Pole of that class, with a great capacity for emotion, for blind enthusiasm; with martial instincts and simple beliefs; and even with the old-time habit of larding his speech with Latin words. And his kindly shrewd eyes, his ruddy face, his lofty brow and his thick, grey, pendent moustache were also very typical of his kind.

—'Listen, Master Francis,' the Prince said familiarly and without preliminaries. 'Listen, old friend. I am going to vanish from here quietly. I go where something louder than my grief and yet something with a voice very like it calls me. I confide in you alone. You will say what's necessary when the time comes.'

The old man understood. His extended hands trembled exceedingly. But as soon as he found his voice he thanked God aloud for letting him live long enough to see the descendant of the illustrious family in its youngest generation give an example *coram gentibus*, of the love of his country and of valour in the field. He doubted not of his dear Prince attaining a place in council and in war worthy of his high birth; he saw already that *in fulgore* of family glory *affulget patriae serenitas*. At the end of the speech he burst into tears and fell into the Prince's arms.

The Prince quieted the old man, and when he had him seated in an armchair and comparatively composed he said:

- 'Don't misunderstand me, Master Francis. You know how I loved

my wife. A loss like that opens one's eyes to unsuspected truths. There is no question here of leadership and glory. I mean to go alone and to fight obscurely in the ranks. I am going to offer my country what is mine to offer, that is my life, as simply as the saddler from Grodek who went through yesterday with his apprentices . . .'

The old man cried out at this. That could never be. He could not allow it. But he had to give way before the arguments and the express

will of the Prince.

—'Ha! If you say that it is a matter of feeling and conscience—so be it. But you cannot go utterly alone. Alas! that I am too old to be of any use. *Cripit verba dolor*, my dear Prince, at the thought that I am over seventy and of no more account in the world than a cripple in the church porch. It seems that to sit at home and pray to God for the nation and for you is all I am fit for. But there is my son, my youngest boy, Peter. He will make a worthy companion for you. And as it happens he's staying with me here. There has not been for ages a Prince S— hazarding his life without a companion of our name to ride by his side. You must have by you somebody who knows who you are if only to let your parents and your old servant hear what is happening to you. And when does your Princely Mightiness mean to start?'

—'In an hour,' said the Prince; and the old man hurried off to warn his son

Prince Roman took up a candlestick and walked quietly along a dark corridor in the silent house. The head nurse said afterwards that waking up suddenly she saw the Prince looking at his child, one hand shading the light from its eyes. He stood and gazed at her for some time, and then putting the candlestick on the floor bent over the cot and kissed lightly the little girl, who did not wake. He went out noiselessly, taking the light away with him. She saw his face perfectly well, but she could read nothing of his purpose in it. It was pale but perfectly calm, and after he turned away from the cot he never looked back at it once.

The only other trusted person, besides the old man and his son Peter, was the Jew Yankel. When he asked the Prince where precisely he wanted to be guided the Prince answered, 'To the nearest party.' A grandson of the Jew, a lanky youth, conducted the two young men by little-known paths, across woods and morasses, and led them in sight of the few fires of a small detachment camped in a hollow. Some invisible

horses neighed, a voice in the dark cried 'Who goes there?' . . . and the young Jew departed hurriedly, explaining that he must make haste

home to be in time for keeping the sabbath.

Thus humbly and in accord with the simplicity of the vision of duty he saw when death had removed the brilliant bandage of happiness from his eyes, did Prince Roman bring his offering to his country. His companion made himself known as the son of the Master-of-the-Horse to the Princes S—— and declared him to be a relation, a distant cousin from the same parts as himself and, as people presumed, of the same name. In truth no one enquired much. Two more young men, clearly of the right sort, had joined. Nothing more natural.

Prince Roman did not remain long in the south. One day while scouting with several others, they were ambushed near the entrance of a village by some Russian infantry. The first discharge laid low a good many and the rest scattered in all directions. The Russians, too, did not stay, being afraid of a return in force. After some time, the peasants coming to view the scene extricated Prince Roman from under his dead horse. He was unhurt, but his faithful companion had been one of the first to fall. The Prince helped the peasants to bury him and the other dead.

Then alone, not certain where to find the body of partisans which was constantly moving about in all directions, he resolved to try and join the main Polish army facing the Russians on the borders of Lithuania. Disguised in peasant clothes, in case of meeting some marauding Cossacks, he wandered a couple of weeks before he came upon a village occupied by a regiment of Polish cavalry on outpost duty.

On a bench, before a peasant hut of a better sort, sat an elderly officer whom he took for the Colonel. The Prince approached respectfully, told his story shortly and stated his desire to enlist; and when asked his name by the officer, who had been looking him over carefully, he gave on the spur of the moment the name of his dead companion.

The elderly officer thought to himself: Here's the son of some peasant proprietor of the liberated class. He liked his appearance. —'And can you read and write, my good fellow?' he asked.

- 'Yes, your Honour, I can,' said the Prince.

—'Good. Come along inside the hut; the regimental adjutant is there. He will enter your name and administer the oath to you.'

The adjutant stared very hard at the new-comer but said nothing.

When all the forms had been gone through and the recruit gone out, he turned to his superior officer.

-'Do you know who that is?'

- 'Who? That Peter? A likely chap.'
- -- 'Nonsense.'

But the adjutant was positive. He had seen the Prince several times, about two years before, in the Castle in Warsaw. He had even spoken to him once at a reception of officers held by the Grand Duke.—'He's changed. He seems much older, but I am certain of my man. I have a good memory for faces.'

The two officers looked at each other in silence. 'He's sure to be recognised sooner or later,' murmured the adjutant. The Colonel

shrugged his shoulders.

—'It's no affair of ours—if he has a fancy to serve in the ranks. As to being recognised it's not so likely. All our officers and men come from the other end of Poland.'

He meditated gravely for a while, then smiled. 'He told me he could read and write. There's nothing to prevent me making him a sergeant at

the first opportunity. He's sure to shape all right.'

Prince Roman as a non-commissioned officer surpassed the Colonel's expectations. Before long Sergeant Peter became famous for his resourcefulness and courage. It was not the reckless courage of a desperate man; it was a self-possessed, as if conscientious, valour which nothing could dismay; a boundless but equable devotion, unaffected by time, by reverses, by the discouragement of endless retreats, by the bitterness of waning hopes and the horrors of pestilence added to the toils and perils of war. It was in this year that the cholera made its first appearance in Europe. It devastated the camps of both armies, affecting the firmest minds with the terror of a mysterious death stalking silently between the piled-up arms and around the bivouac fires.

A sudden shriek would wake up the harassed soldiers and they would see in the glow of embers one of themselves writhe on the ground like a worm trodden on by an invisible foot. And before the dawn broke he would be stiff and cold. Parties so visited have been known to rise like one man, abandon the fire and run off into the night in mute panic. Or a comrade talking to you on the march would stammer suddenly in the middle of a sentence, roll affrighted eyes, and fall

down with distorted face and blue lips breaking the ranks with the convulsions of his agony. Men were struck in the saddle, on sentry duty, in the firing-line, carrying orders, serving the guns. I have been told that in a battalion forming under fire with perfect steadiness for the assault of a village, three cases occurred within five minutes at the head of the column; and the attack could not be delivered because the leading companies scattered all over the fields like chaff before the wind.

Sergeant Peter, young as he was, had a great influence over his men. It was said that the number of desertions in the squadron in which he served was less than in any other in the whole of that cavalry division. Such was supposed to be the compelling example of one man's quiet

intrepidity in facing every form of danger and terror.

However that may be, he was liked and trusted generally. When the end came and the remnants of that army corps, hard pressed on all sides, were preparing to cross the Prussian frontier, Sergeant Peter had enough influence to rally round him a score of troopers. He managed to escape with them at night from the hemmed-in army. He led this band through 200 miles of country covered by numerous Russian detachments and ravaged by the cholera. But this was not to avoid captivity, to go into hiding and try to save themselves. No. He led them into a fortress which was still occupied by the Poles, and where the last stand of the vanquished Revolution was to be made.

This looks like mere fanaticism. But fanaticism is human. Man has adored ferocious divinities. There is ferocity in every passion, even in love itself. The religion of undying hope resembles the mad cult of despair, of death, of annihilation. The difference lies in the moral motive springing from the secret needs and the unexpressed aspiration of the believers. It is only to vain men that all is vanity; and all is deception only to those who have never been sincere with themselves.

It was in the fortress that my grandfather found himself together with Sergeant Peter. My grandfather was a neighbour of the S——family in the country, but he did not know Prince Roman, who, however, knew his name perfectly well. The Prince introduced himself one night as they both sat on the ramparts, leaning against a gun-carriage.

The service he wished to ask for was, in case of his being killed, to

have the intelligence conveyed to his parents.

They talked in low tones, the other servants of the piece lying about near them. My grandfather gave the required promise, and then asked frankly—for he was greatly interested by the disclosure so unexpectedly made:

— 'But tell me, Prince, why this request? Have you any evil forebodings as to yourself?'

— 'Not in the least; I was thinking of my people. They have no idea where I am,' answered Prince Roman. 'I'll engage to do as much for you, if you like. It's certain that half of us at least shall be killed before the end, so there's an even chance of one of us surviving the other.'

My grandfather told him where, as he supposed, his wife and children were then. From that moment till the end of the siege the two were much together. On the day of the great assault my grandfather received a severe wound. The town was taken. Next day the citadel itself, its hospital full of dead and dying, its magazines empty, its defenders having burnt their last cartridge, opened its gates.

During all the campaign the Prince, exposing his person conscientiously on every occasion, had not received a scratch. No one had recognised him, or at any rate had betrayed his identity. Till then, as long as

he did his duty, it had mattered nothing who he was.

Now, however, the position was changed. As ex-guardsman and as late ordnance officer to the Emperor, this rebel ran a serious risk of being given special attention in the shape of a firing-squad at ten paces. For more than a month he remained lost in the miserable crowd of prisoners packed in the casemates of the citadel, with just enough food to keep body and soul together, but otherwise allowed to die from wounds, privation and disease at the rate of forty or so a day.

The position of the fortress being central, new parties, captured in the open in the course of a thorough pacification, were being sent in frequently. Amongst such new-comers there happened to be a young man, a personal friend of the Prince from his school-days. He recognised him, and in the extremity of his dismay cried aloud, 'My God!

Roman, you here!'

It is said that years of life embittered by remorse paid for this momentary lack of self-control. All this happened in the main quadrangle of the citadel. The warning gesture of the Prince came too late. An officer of the gendarmes on guard had heard the exclamation. The incident appeared to him worth inquiring into. The investigation which followed was not very arduous because the Prince, asked categorically for his real name, owned up at once.

The intelligence of the Prince S—— being found amongst the prisoners was sent to St Petersburg. His parents were already there, living in sorrow, incertitude and apprehension. The capital of the Empire was the safest place to reside in for a noble whose son had disappeared so mysteriously from home in a time of rebellion. The old people had not heard from him, or of him, for months. They took care not to contradict the rumours of suicide from despair circulating in the great world, which remembered the interesting love-match, the charming and frank happiness brought to an end by death. But they hoped secretly that their son survived, and that he had been able to cross the frontier with that part of the army which had surrendered to the Prussians.

The news of his captivity was a crushing blow. Directly, nothing could be done for him. But the greatness of their name, of their position, their wide relations and connections in the highest spheres, enabled his parents to act indirectly; and they moved heaven and earth, as the saying is, to save their son from the 'consequences of his madness', as poor Prince John did not hesitate to express himself. Great personages were approached by society leaders, high dignitaries were interviewed, powerful officials were induced to take an interest in that affair. The help of every possible secret influence was enlisted. Some Private Secretaries got heavy bribes. The mistress of a certain senator obtained a large sum of money.

But, as I have said, in such a glaring case no direct appeal could be made and no open steps taken. All that could be done was to incline by private representation the mind of the President of the Military Commission to the side of clemency. He ended by being impressed by the hints and suggestions, some of them from very high quarters, which he received from St Petersburg. And, after all, the gratitude of such great nobles as the Princes S—— was something worth having from a worldly point of view. He was a good Russian, but he was also a good-natured man. Moreover, the hate of Poles was not at that time a cardinal article of patriotic creed as it became some thirty years later. He felt well disposed at first sight towards that young man, bronzed, thin-faced, worn out by months of hard campaigning, the hardships of the siege and the rigours of captivity.

The Commission was composed of three officers. It sat in the citadel in a bare, vaulted room behind a long black table. Some clerks occupied

the two ends, and, besides the gendarmes who brought in the Prince, there was no one else there.

Within those four sinister walls shutting out from him all the sights and sounds of liberty, all hopes of the future, all consoling illusions—alone in the face of his enemies erected for judges—who can tell how much love of life there was in Prince Roman? How much remained of that sense of duty, revealed to him in sorrow? How much of his awakened love for his native country? That country which demands to be loved as no other country has ever been loved, with the mournful affection one bears to the unforgotten dead and with the unextinguishable fire of a hopeless passion which only a living, breathing, warm ideal can kindle in our breasts, for our pride, for our weariness, for our exultation, for our undoing.

There is something monstrous in the thought of such an exaction till it stands before us embodied in the shape of a fidelity without fear and without reproach. Nearing the supreme moment of his life the Prince could only have had the feeling that it was about to end. He answered the questions put to him clearly, concisely . . . with the most profound indifference. After all those tense months of action, to talk was a weariness to him. But he concealed it, lest his foes should suspect in his manner the apathy of discouragement or the numbness of a crushed spirit. The details of his conduct could have no importance one way or another; with his thoughts these men had nothing to do. He preserved a scrupulously courteous tone. He had refused the permission to sit down.

What happened at this preliminary examination is only known from the Presiding Officer. Pursuing the only possible course in that glaringly bad case he tried from the first to bring to the Prince's mind the line of defence he wished him to take. He absolutely framed his questions so as to put the right answers in the culprit's mouth, going so far as to suggest the very words:—how, distracted by excessive grief after his young wife's death, rendered irresponsible for his conduct by his despair, in a moment of blind recklessness, without realising the highly reprehensible nature of the act, nor yet its danger and its dishonour, he went off to join the nearest rebels on a sudden impulse. And that now, penitently...

But Prince Roman was silent. The military judges looked at him hopefully. In silence he reached for a pen and wrote on a sheet of paper

he found under his hand: 'I joined the national rising from conviction.'

He pushed the paper across the table. The President took it up, showed it in turn to his two colleagues sitting to the right and left, then looking fixedly at Prince Roman let it fall from his hand. And the silence remained unbroken till he spoke to the gendarmes ordering them to remove the prisoner.

Such was the written testimony of Prince Roman in the supreme moment of his life. I have heard that the Princes of the S—— family, in all its branches, adopted the last two words, 'from conviction', for the device under the armorial bearings of their house. I don't know whether the report is true. My uncle could not tell me. He remarked only that, naturally, it was not to be seen on Prince Roman's own seal.

He was condemned for life to Siberian mines. Emperor Nicholas, who always took personal cognisance of all sentences on Polish nobility, wrote with his own hand in the margin: 'The authorities are severely warned to take care that this convict walks in chains like any other crim-

inal every step of the way.'

It was a sentence of deferred death. Very few survived entombment in these mines for more than three years. Yet as he was reported as still alive at the end of that time, he was allowed, on a petition of his parents and by way of exceptional grace, to serve as common soldier in the Caucasus. All communication with him was forbidden. He had no civil rights. For all practical purposes except that of suffering he was a dead man. The little child he had been so careful not to wake up when he kissed her in her cot, inherited all the fortune after Prince John's death. Her existence saved those immense estates from confiscation.

It was twenty-five years before Prince Roman, stone-deaf, his health broken, was permitted to return to Poland. His daughter, married splendidly to a Polish-Austrian *grand seigneur* and moving in the cosmopolitan sphere of the highest European aristocracy, lived mostly abroad in Nice and Vienna. He, settling down on one of her estates, not the one with the palatial residence but another where there was a modest little house, saw very little of her.

But Prince Roman did not shut.himself up as if his work were done. There was hardly anything done in the private and public life of the neighbourhood in which Prince Roman's advice and assistance were not called upon, and never in vain. It was well said that his days did not belong to himself but to his fellow citizens. And especially he was the

particular friend of all returned exiles, helping them with purse and advice, arranging their affairs and finding them means of livelihood.

I heard from my uncle many tales of his devoted activity, in which he was always guided by a simple wisdom, a high sense of honour and the most scrupulous conception of private and public probity. He remains a living figure for me because of that meeting in a billiardroom, when, in my anxiety to hear about a particularly wolfish wolf, I came in momentary contact with a man who was pre-eminently a man amongst all men capable of feeling deeply, of believing steadily, of loving ardently.

I remember to this day the grasp of Prince Roman's bony, wrinkled hand closing on my small inky paw, and my uncle's half-serious, half-

amused way of looking down at his trespassing nephew.

They moved on and forgot that little boy. But I did not move; I gazed after them, not so much disappointed as disconcerted by this Prince so utterly unlike a prince in a fairy-tale. They moved very slowly across the room. Before reaching the other door the Prince stopped; and I heard him—I seem to hear him now—saying:—'I wish you would write to Vienna about filling up that post. He's a most deserving fellow—and your recommendation would be decisive.'

My uncle's face turned to him expressed genuine wonder. It said as plainly as any speech could say: What better recommendation than a father's can be needed? The Prince was quick at reading expressions. Again he spoke with the toneless accent of a man who has not heard his own voice for years, for whom the soundless world is like an abode of silent shades.

And to this day I remember the very words.

—'I ask you because, you see, my daughter and my son-in-law don't believe me to be a good judge of men. They think that I let myself be guided too much by mere sentiment.'



## The Tale



Outside the large single window the crepuscular light was dying out slowly in a great square gleam without colour, framed rigidly in the gathering shades of the room.

It was a long room. The irresistible tide of the night ran into the most distant part of it, where the whispering of a man's voice, passionately interrupted and passionately renewed, seemed to plead against the answering murmurs of infinite sadness.

At last no answering murmur came. His movement when he rose slowly from his knees by the side of the deep, shadowy couch holding the shadowy suggestion of a reclining woman revealed him tall under the low ceiling, and sombre all over except for the crude discord of the white collar under the shape of his head and the faint, minute spark of a brass button here and there on his uniform.

He stood over her a moment masculine and mysterious in his immobility before he sat down on a chair near by. He could see only the faint oval of her upturned face and, extended on her black dress, her pale hands, a moment before abandoned to his kisses and now as if too weary to move.

He dared not make a sound, shrinking as a man would do from the prosaic necessities of existence. As usual, it was the woman who had the courage. Her voice was heard first—almost conventional—while her being vibrated yet with conflicting emotions.

'Tell me something,' she said.

The darkness hid his surprise and then his smile. Had he not just said to her everything worth saying in the world—and that not for the first time!

'What am I to tell you?' he asked, in a voice creditably steady. He was beginning to feel grateful to her for that something final in her tone which had eased the strain.

'Why not tell me a tale?'

'A tale!' He was really amazed.

'Yes. Why not?'

These words came with a slight petulance, the hint of a loved woman's capricious will, which is capricious only because it feels itself to be a law, embarrassing sometimes and always difficult to elude.

'Why not?' he repeated, with a slightly mocking accent, as though he had been asked to give her the moon. But now he was feeling a little angry with her for that feminine mobility that slips out of an emotion as easily as out of a splendid gown.

He heard her say a little unsteadily, with a sort of fluttering inton-

ation which made him think suddenly of a butterfly's flight:

'You used to tell—your—your simple and—and professional—tales very well at one time. Or well enough to interest me. You had a—a sort of art—in the days—the days before the war.'

'Really?' he said, with involuntary gloom. 'But now, you see, the war is going on,' he continued in such a dead, equable tone that she felt a slight chill fall over her shoulders. And yet she persisted. For there's nothing more unswerving in the world than a woman's caprice.

'It could be a tale not of this world,' she explained.

'You want a tale of the other, the better world?' he asked, with a matter-of-fact surprise. 'You must evoke for that task those who have already gone there.'

'No. I don't mean that. I mean another—some other—world. In

the universe—not in heaven.'

'I am relieved. But you forget that I have only a five days' leave.'

'Yes. And I've also taken a five days' leave from—from my duties.'

'I like that word.'

'What word?'

'Duty.'

'It is horrible—sometimes.'

'Oh, that's because you think it's narrow. But it isn't. It contains infinities, and—and so——'

'What is this jargon?'

He disregarded the interjected scorn. 'An infinity of absolution, for instance,' he continued. 'But as to this "another world"—who's going to look for it and for the tale that is in it?'

'You,' she said, with a strange, almost rough, sweetness of assertion. He made a shadowy movement of assent in his chair, the irony of which not even the gathered darkness could render mysterious.

'As you will. In that world, then, there was once upon a time a Commanding Officer and a Northman. Put in the capitals, please, because they had no other names. It was a world of seas and continents and islands——'

'Like the earth,' she murmured, bitterly.

'Yes. What else could you expect from sending a man made of our

common, tormented clay on a voyage of discovery? What else could he find? What else could you understand or care for, or feel the existence of even? There was comedy in it and slaughter.'

'Always like the earth,' she murmured.

'Always. And since I could find in the universe only what was deeply rooted in the fibres of my being there was love in it too. But we won't talk of that.'

'No. We won't,' she said, in a neutral tone which concealed perfectly her relief—or her disappointment. Then after a pause she added: 'It's going to be a comic story.'

'Well——' he paused too. 'Yes. In a way. In a very grim way. It will be human, and, as you know, comedy is but a matter of the visual angle. And it won't be a noisy story. All the long guns in it will be dumb—as dumb as so many telescopes.'

'Ah, there are guns in it, then! And may I ask-where?'

'Afloat. You remember that the world of which we speak had its seas. A war was going on in it. It was a funny world and terribly in earnest. Its war was being carried on over the land, over the water, under the water, up in the air, and even under the ground. And many young men in it, mostly in wardrooms and mess-rooms, used to say to each other—pardon the unparliamentary word—they used to say, "It's a damned bad war, but it's better than no war at all." Sounds flippant, doesn't it?"

He heard a nervous, impatient sigh in the depths of the couch while he went on without a pause:

'And yet there is more in it than meets the eye. I mean more wisdom. Flippancy, like comedy, is but a matter of visual first-impression. That world was not very wise. But there was in it a certain amount of common working sagacity. That, however, was mostly worked by the neutrals in diverse ways, public and private, which had to be watched; watched by acute minds and also by actual sharp eyes. They had to be very sharp indeed, too, I assure you.'

'I can imagine,' she murmured, appreciatively.

'What is there that you can't imagine?' he pronounced, soberly. 'You have the world in you. But let us go back to our Commanding Officer, who, of course, commanded a ship of a sort. My tales if often professional (as you remarked just now) have never been technical. So I'll just tell you that the ship was of a very ornamental sort once, with

lots of grace and elegance and luxury about her. Yes, once! She was like a pretty woman who had suddenly put on a suit of sackcloth and stuck revolvers in her belt. But she floated lightly, she moved nimbly, she was quite good enough.'

'That was the opinion of the Commanding Officer?' said the voice

from the couch.

'It was. He used to be sent out with her along certain coasts to see—what he could see. Just that. And sometimes he had some preliminary information to help him, and sometimes he had not. And it was all one, really. It was about as useful as information trying to convey the locality and intentions of a cloud, of a phantom taking shape here and there and

impossible to seize, would have been.

'It was in the early days of the war. What at first used to amaze the Commanding Officer was the unchanged face of the waters, with its familiar expression, neither more friendly nor more hostile. On fine days the sun strikes sparks upon the blue; here and there a peaceful smudge of smoke hangs in the distance, and it is impossible to believe that the familiar clear horizon traces the limit of one great circular ambush.

'Yes, it is impossible to believe, till some day you see a ship not your own ship (that isn't so impressive), but some ship in company, blow up all of a sudden and plop under almost before you know what had happened to her. Then you begin to believe. Henceforth you go out for the work to see—what you can see, and you keep on at it with the conviction that some day you will die from something you have not seen. One envies the soldiers at the end of the day, wiping the sweat and blood from their faces, counting the dead fallen to their hands, looking at the devastated fields, the torn earth that seems to suffer and bleed with them. One does, really. The final brutality of it—the taste of primitive passion—the ferocious frankness of the blow struck with one's hand—the direct call and the straight response. Well, the sea gave you nothing of that, and seemed to pretend that there was nothing the matter with the world.'

She interrupted, stirring a little.

'Oh, yes. Sincerity—frankness—passion—three words of your gospel. Don't I know them!'

'Think! Isn't it ours—believed in common?' he asked, anxiously, yet without expecting an answer, and went on at once. 'Such were the feel-

ings of the Commanding Officer. When the night came trailing over the sea, hiding what looked like the hypocrisy of an old friend, it was a relief. The night blinds you frankly—and there are circumstances when the sunlight may grow as odious to one as falsehood itself. Night is all right.

'At night the Commanding Officer could let his thoughts get away—I won't tell you where. Somewhere where there was no choice but between truth and death. But thick weather, though it blinded one, brought no such relief. Mist is deceitful, the dead luminosity of the fog is irritating. It seems that you *ought* to see.

'One gloomy, nasty day the ship was steaming along her beat in sight of a rocky, dangerous coast that stood out intensely black like an Indian-ink drawing on grey paper. Presently the Second in command spoke to his chief. He thought he saw something on the water, to seaward. Small wreckage, perhaps.

"But there shouldn't be any wreckage here, sir," he remarked.

"No," said the Commanding Officer. "The last reported submarined ships were sunk a long way to the westward. But one never knows. There may have been others since then not reported nor seen. Gone with all hands."

'That was how it began. The ship's course was altered to pass the object close; for it was necessary to have a good look at what one could see. Close, but without touching; for it was not advisable to come in contact with objects of any form whatever floating casually about. Close, but without stopping or even diminishing speed; for in those times it was not prudent to linger on any particular spot, even for a moment. I may tell you at once that the object was not dangerous in itself. No use in describing it. It may have been nothing more remarkable than, say, a barrel of a certain shape and colour. But it was significant.

'The smooth bow-wave hove it up as if for a closer inspection, and then the ship, brought again to her course, turned her back on it with indifference, while twenty pairs of eyes on her deck stared in all directions trying to see—what they could see.

'The Commanding Officer and his Second in command discussed the object with understanding. It appeared to them to be not so much a proof of the sagacity as of the activity of certain neutrals. This activity had in many cases taken the form of replenishing the stores of certain submarines at sea. This was generally believed, if not absolutely known. But the very nature of things in those early days pointed that way. The object, looked at closely and turned away from with apparent indifference, put it beyond doubt that something of the sort had been done

somewhere in the neighbourhood.

'The object in itself was more than suspect. But the fact of its being left in evidence roused other suspicions. Was it the result of some deep and devilish purpose? As to that all speculation soon appeared to be a vain thing. Finally the two officers came to the conclusion that it was left there most likely by accident, complicated possibly by some unforeseen necessity; such, perhaps, as the sudden need to get away quickly from the spot, or something of that kind.

'Their discussion had been carried on in curt, weighty phrases, separated by long, thoughtful silences. And all the time their eyes roamed about the horizon in an everlasting, almost mechanical effort of vigi-

lance. The younger man summed up grimly:

"Well, it's evidence. That's what this is. Evidence of what we were

pretty certain of before. And plain, too."

"And much good it will do to us," retorted the Commanding Officer. "The parties are miles away; the submarine, devil only knows where, ready to kill; and the noble neutral slipping away to the eastward, ready to lie!"

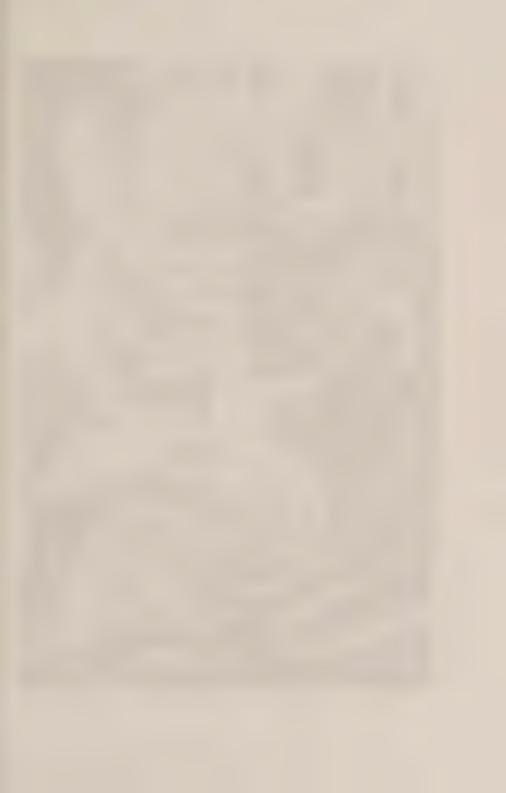
'The Second in command laughed a little at the tone. But he guessed that the neutral wouldn't even have to lie very much. Fellows like that, unless caught in the very act, felt themselves pretty safe. They could afford to chuckle. That fellow was probably chuckling to himself. It's very possible he had been before at the game and didn't care a rap for the bit of evidence left behind. It was a game in which practice made one bold and successful too.

'And again he laughed faintly. But his Commanding Officer was in revolt against the murderous stealthiness of methods and the atrocious callousness of complicities that seemed to taint the very source of men's deep emotions and noblest activities; to corrupt their imagination which builds up the final conceptions of life and death. He suffered——'

The voice from the sofa interrupted the narrator.

'How well I can understand that in him!'

He bent forward slightly.





'Yes. I too. Everything should be open in love and war. Open as the day, since both are the call of an ideal which it is so easy, so terribly easy, to degrade in the name of Victory.'

He paused; then went on:

'I don't know that the Commanding Officer delved so deep as that into his feelings. But he did suffer from them—a sort of disenchanted sadness. It is possible, even, that he suspected himself of folly. Man is various. But he had no time for much introspection, because from the south-west a wall of fog had advanced upon his ship. Great convolutions of vapours flew over, swirling about masts and funnel, which looked as if they were beginning to melt. Then they vanished.

'The ship was stopped, all sounds ceased, and the very fog became motionless, growing denser and as if solid in its amazing dumb immobility. The men at their stations lost sight of each other. Footsteps sounded stealthy; rare voices, impersonal and remote, died out without resonance. A blind white stillness took possession of the world.

'It looked, too, as if it would last for days. I don't mean to say that the fog did not vary a little in its density. Now and then it would thin out mysteriously, revealing to the men a more or less ghostly presentment of their ship. Several times the shadow of the coast itself swam darkly before their eyes through the fluctuating opaque brightness of the great white cloud clinging to the water.

'Taking advantage of these moments, the ship had been moved cautiously nearer the shore. It was useless to remain out in such thick weather. Her officers knew every nook and cranny of the coast along their beat. They thought that she would be much better in a certain cove. It wasn't a large place, just ample room for a ship to swing at her anchor. She would have an easier time of it till the fog lifted up.

'Slowly, with infinite caution and patience, they crept closer and closer, seeing no more of the cliffs than an evanescent dark loom with a narrow border of angry foam at its foot. At the moment of anchoring the fog was so thick that for all they could see they might have been a thousand miles out in the open sea. Yet the shelter of the land could be felt. There was a peculiar quality in the stillness of the air. Very faint, very elusive the wash of the ripple against the encircling land reached their ears, with mysterious sudden pauses.

'The anchor dropped, the leads were laid in. The Commanding Officer went below into his cabin. But he had not been there very long when a voice outside his door requested his presence on deck. He thought to himself: "What is it now?" He felt some impatience at being

called out again to face the wearisome fog.

'He found that it had thinned again a little and had taken on a gloomy hue from the dark cliffs which had no form, no outline, but asserted themselves as a curtain of shadows all round the ship, except in one bright spot, which was the entrance from the open sea. Several officers were looking that way from the bridge. The Second in command met him with the breathlessly whispered information that there was another ship in the cove.

'She had been made out by several pairs of eyes only a couple of minutes before. She was lying at anchor very near the entrance—a mere vague blot on the fog's brightness. And the Commanding Officer by staring in the direction pointed out to him by eager hands ended by dis-

tinguishing it at last himself. Indubitably a vessel of some sort.

"It's a wonder we didn't run slap into her when coming in," observed the Second in command.

"Send a boat on board before she vanishes," said the Commanding Officer. He surmised that this was a coaster. It could hardly be anything else. But another thought came into his head suddenly. "It is a wonder," he said to his Second in command, who had rejoined him after sending the boat away.

'By that time both of them had been struck by the fact that the ship so suddenly discovered had not manifested her presence by ringing her bell.

"We came in very quietly, that's true," concluded the younger officer. "But they must have heard our leadsmen at least. We couldn't have passed her more than fifty yards off. The closest shave! They may even have made us out, since they were aware of something coming in. And the strange thing is that we never heard a sound from her. The fellows on board must have been holding their breath."

"'Aye," said the Commanding Officer, thoughtfully.

'In due course the boarding-boat returned, appearing suddenly alongside, as though she had burrowed her way under the fog. The officer in charge came up to make his report, but the Commanding Officer didn't give him time to begin. He cried from a distance:

"Coaster, isn't she?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;No, sir. A stranger—a neutral," was the answer.

"No. Really! Well, tell us all about it. What is she doing here?"

'The young man stated then that he had been told a long and complicated story of engine troubles. But it was plausible enough from a strictly professional point of view and it had the usual features: disablement, dangerous drifting along the shore, weather more or less thick for days, fear of a gale, ultimately a resolve to go in and anchor anywhere on the coast, and so on. Fairly plausible.

"Engines still disabled?" enquired the Commanding Officer.

"No, sir. She has steam on them."

'The Commanding Officer took his Second aside. "By Jove!" he said, "you were right! They were holding their breaths as we passed them. They were."

'But the Second in command had his doubts now.

"A fog like this does muffle small sounds, sir," he remarked. "And what could his object be, after all?"

"To sneak out unnoticed," answered the Commanding Officer.

"Then why didn't he? He might have done it, you know. Not exactly unnoticed, perhaps. I don't suppose he could have slipped his cable without making some noise. Still, in a minute or so he would have been lost to view—clean gone before we had made him out fairly. Yet he didn't."

'They looked at each other. The Commanding Officer shook his head. Such suspicions as the one which had entered his head are not defended easily. He did not even state it openly. The boarding officer finished his report. The cargo of the ship was of a harmless and useful character. She was bound to an English port. Papers and everything in perfect order. Nothing suspicious to be detected anywhere.

'Then passing to the men, he reported the crew on deck as the usual lot. Engineers of the well-known type, and very full of their achievement in repairing the engines. The mate surly. The master rather a fine specimen of a Northman, civil enough, but appeared to have been drinking. Seemed to be recovering from a regular bout of it.

"I told him I couldn't give him permission to proceed. He said he wouldn't dare to move his ship her own length out in such weather as this, permission or no permission. I left a man on board, though."

"Quite right."

'The Commanding Officer, after communing with his suspicions for a time, called his Second aside. "What if she were the very ship which had been feeding some infernal submarine or other?" he said in an undertone.

'The other started. Then, with conviction:

"She would get off scot-free. You couldn't prove it, sir."

"I want to look into it myself."

"From the report we've heard I am afraid you couldn't even make a case for reasonable suspicion, sir."

"I'll go on board all the same."

'He had made up his mind. Curiosity is the great motive power of hatred and love. What did he expect to find? He could not have told anybody—not even himself.

'What he really expected to find there was the atmosphere, the atmosphere of gratuitous treachery, which in his view nothing could excuse; for he thought that even a passion of unrighteousness for its own sake could not excuse that. But could he detect it? Sniff it? Taste it? Receive some mysterious communication which would turn his invincible suspicions into a certitude strong enough to provoke action with all its risks?

'The master met him on the after-deck, looming up in the fog amongst the blurred shapes of the usual ship's fittings. He was a robust Northman, bearded, and in the force of his age. A round leather cap fitted his head closely. His hands were rammed deep into the pockets of his short leather jacket. He kept them there while he explained that at sea he lived in the chart-room, and led the way there, striding carelessly. Just before reaching the door under the bridge he staggered a little, recovered himself, flung it open, and stood aside, leaning his shoulder as if involuntarily against the side of the house, and staring vaguely into the fog-filled space. But he followed the Commanding Officer at once, flung the door to, snapped on the electric light, and hastened to thrust his hands back into his pockets, as though afraid of being seized by them either in friendship or in hostility.

'The place was stuffy and hot. The usual chart-rack overhead was full, and the chart on the table was kept unrolled by an empty cup standing on a saucer half full of some spilt dark liquid. A slightly nibbled biscuit reposed on the chronometer-case. There were two settees, and one of them had been made up into a bed with a pillow and some blankets, which were now very much tumbled. The Northman let himsalf fall on it, his hands will in his products.

self fall on it, his hands still in his pockets.

"Well, here I am," he said, with a curious air of being surprised at the sound of his own voice.

'The Commanding Officer from the other settee observed the handsome, flushed face. Drops of fog hung on the yellow beard and moustaches of the Northman. The much darker eyebrows ran together in a puzzled frown, and suddenly he jumped up.

"What I mean is that I don't know where I am. I really don't," he burst out, with extreme earnestness. "Hang it all! I got turned around somehow. The fog has been after me for a week. More than a week.

And then my engines broke down. I will tell you how it was."

'He burst out into loquacity. It was not hurried, but it was insistent. It was not continuous for all that. It was broken by the most queer, thoughtful pauses. Each of these pauses lasted no more than a couple of seconds, and each had the profundity of an endless meditation. When he began again nothing betrayed in him the slightest consciousness of these intervals. There was the same fixed glance, the same unchanged earnestness of tone. He didn't know. Indeed, more than one of these pauses occurred in the middle of a sentence.

'The Commanding Officer listened to the tale. It struck him as more plausible than simple truth is in the habit of being. But that, perhaps, was prejudice. All the time the Northman was speaking the Commanding Officer had been aware of an inward voice, a grave murmur in the depth of his very own self, telling another tale, as if on purpose to keep alive in him his indignation and his anger with that baseness of greed or of mere outlook which lies often at the root of simple ideas.

'It was the story that had been already told to the boarding officer an hour or so before. The Commanding Officer nodded slightly at the Northman from time to time. The latter came to an end and turned his

eyes away. He added, as an afterthought:

"Wasn't it enough to drive a man out of his mind with worry? And it's my first voyage to this part, too. And the ship's my own. Your officer has seen the papers. She isn't much, as you can see for yourself. Just an old cargo-boat. Bare living for my family."

'He raised a big arm to point at a row of photographs plastering the bulkhead. The movement was ponderous, as if the arm had been made

of lead. The Commanding Officer said, carelessly:

"You will be making a fortune yet for your family with this old ship."

"Yes, if I don't lose her," said the Northman, gloomily.

"I mean—out of this war," added the Commanding Officer.

'The Northman stared at him in a curiously unseeing and at the same time interested manner, as only eyes of a particular blue shade can stare.

"And you wouldn't be angry at it," he said, "would you? You are too much of a gentleman. We didn't bring this on you. And suppose we sat down and cried. What good would that be? Let those cry who made the trouble," he concluded, with energy. "Time's money, you say. Well—this time is money. Oh! isn't it!"

'The Commanding Officer tried to keep under the feeling of immense disgust. He said to himself that it was unreasonable. Men were like that—moral cannibals feeding on each other's misfortunes. He

said aloud:

"You have made it perfectly plain how it is that you are here. Your log-book confirms you very minutely. Of course, a log-book may be cooked. Nothing easier."

'The Northman never moved a muscle. He was gazing at the floor; he seemed not to have heard. He raised his head after a while.

"But you can't suspect me of anything," he muttered, negligently.

'The Commanding Officer thought: "Why should he say this?"

'Immediately afterwards the man before him added: "My cargo is for an English port."

'His voice had turned husky for the moment. The Commanding Officer reflected: "That's true. There can be nothing. I can't suspect him. Yet why was he lying with steam up in this fog—and then, hearing us come in, why didn't he give some sign of life? Why? Could it be anything else but a guilty conscience? He could tell by the leadsmen that this was a man-of-war."

'Yes—why? The Commanding Officer went on thinking: "Suppose I ask him and then watch his face. He will betray himself in some way. It's perfectly plain that the fellow has been drinking. Yes, he has been drinking; but he will have a lie ready all the same." The Commanding Officer was one of those men who are made morally and almost physically uncomfortable by the mere thought of having to beat down a lie. He shrank from the act in scorn and disgust, which was invincible because more temperamental than moral.

'So he went out on deck instead and had the crew mustered formally for his inspection. He found them very much what the report of the boarding officer had led him to expect. And from their answers to his questions he could discover no flaw in the log-book story.

'He dismissed them. His impression of them was—a picked lot; have been promised a fistful of money each if this came off; all slightly anxious, but not frightened. Not a single one of them likely to give the show away. They don't feel in danger of their life. They know England and English ways too well!

'He felt alarmed at catching himself thinking as if his vaguest suspicions were turning into a certitude. For, indeed, there was no shadow of reason for his interferences. There was nothing to give away.

'He returned to the chart-room. The Northman had lingered behind there; and something subtly different in his bearing, more bold in his blue, glassy stare, induced the Commanding Officer to conclude that the fellow had snatched at the opportunity to take another swig at the bottle he must have had concealed somewhere.

'He noticed, too, that the Northman on meeting his eyes put on an elaborately surprised expression. At least, it seemed elaborated. Nothing could be trusted. And the Englishman felt himself with astonishing conviction faced by an enormous lie, solid like a wall, with no way round to get at the truth, whose ugly murderous face he seemed to see peeping over at him with a cynical grin.

"I daresay", he began, suddenly, "you are wondering at my proceedings, though I am not detaining you, am I? You wouldn't dare to

move in this fog?"

"I don't know where I am," the Northman ejaculated, earnestly. "I really don't."

'He looked around as if the very chart-room fittings were strange to him. The Commanding Officer asked him whether he had not seen any unusual objects floating about while he was at sea.

"Objects! What objects? We were groping blind in the fog for

days."

"We had a few clear intervals," said the Commanding Officer. "And I'll tell you what we have seen and the conclusion I've come to about it."

'He told him in a few words. He heard the sound of a sharp breath indrawn through closed teeth. The Northman with his hand on the table stood absolutely motionless and dumb. He stood as if thunder-struck. Then he produced a fatuous smile.

'Or at least so it appeared to the Commanding Officer. Was this significant, or of no meaning whatever? He didn't know, he couldn't tell. All the truth had departed out of the world as if drawn in, absorbed in this monstrous villainy this man was—or was not—guilty of.

"Shooting's too good for people that conceive neutrality in this

pretty way," remarked the Commanding Officer, after a silence.

"Yes, yes," the Northman assented, hurriedly—then added an

unexpected and dreamy-voiced "Perhaps".

'Was he pretending to be drunk, or only trying to appear sober? His glance was straight, but it was somewhat glazed. His lips outlined themselves firmly under his yellow moustache. But they twitched. Did they twitch? And why was he drooping like this in his attitude?

"There's no perhaps about it," pronounced the Commanding

Officer sternly.

'The Northman had straightened himself. And unexpectedly he looked stern too.

"No. But what about the tempters? Better kill that lot off. There's about four, five, six million of them," he said, grimly; but in a moment changed into a whining key. "But I had better hold my tongue. You have some suspicions."

"No, I've no suspicions," declared the Commanding Officer.

'He never faltered. At that moment he had the certitude. The air of the chart-room was thick with guilt and falsehood braving the discovery, defying simple right, common decency, all humanity of feeling,

every scruple of conduct.

'The Northman drew a long breath. "Well, we know that you English are gentlemen. But let us speak the truth. Why should we love you so very much? You haven't done anything to be loved. We don't love the other people, of course. They haven't done anything for that either. A fellow comes along with a bag of gold . . . I haven't been in Rotter-dam my last voyage for nothing."

"You may be able to tell something interesting, then, to our people

when you come into port," interjected the Officer.

"I might. But you keep some people in your pay at Rotterdam. Let them report. I am a neutral—am I not?... Have you ever seen a poor man on one side and a bag of gold on the other? Of course, I couldn't be tempted. I haven't the nerve for it. Really I haven't. It's nothing to me. I am just talking openly for once." "Yes. And I am listening to you," said the Commanding Officer

quietly.

"The Northman leaned forward over the table. "Now that I know you have no suspicions, I talk. You don't know what a poor man is. I do. I am poor myself. This old ship, she isn't much, and she is mortgaged, too. Bare living, no more. Of course, I wouldn't have the nerve. But a man who has nerve! See. The stuff he takes aboard looks like any other cargo—packages, barrels, tins, copper tubes—what not. He doesn't see it work. It isn't real to him. But he sees the gold. That's real. Of course, nothing could induce me. I suffer from an internal disease. I would either go crazy from anxiety—or—or—take to drink or something. The risk is too great. Why—ruin!"

"It should be death." The Commanding Officer got up, after this curt declaration, which the other received with a hard stare oddly combined with an uncertain smile. The Officer's gorge rose at the atmosphere of murderous complicity which surrounded him, denser, more

impenetrable, more acrid than the fog outside.

"It's nothing to me," murmured the Northman, swaying visibly.

""Of course not," assented the Commanding Officer, with a great effort to keep his voice calm and low. The certitude was strong within him. "But I am going to clear all you fellows off this coast at once. And I will begin with you. You must leave in half an hour."

'By that time the Officer was walking along the deck with the North-

man at his elbow.

"What! In this fog?" the latter cried out, huskily.

"Yes, you will have to go in this fog."

"But I don't know where I am. I really don't."

'The Commanding Officer turned round. A sort of fury possessed him. The eyes of the two men met. Those of the Northman expressed a profound amazement.

""Oh, you don't know how to get out." The Commanding Officer spoke with composure, but his heart was beating with anger and dread. "I will give you your course. Steer south-by-east-half-east for about four miles and then you will be clear to haul to the eastward for your port. The weather will clear up before very long."

"Must I? What could induce me? I haven't the nerve."

"And yet you must go. Unless you want to—"

"I don't want to," panted the Northman. "I've enough of it."

"The Commanding Officer got over the side. The Northman remained still as if rooted to the deck. Before his boat reached his ship the Commanding Officer heard the steamer beginning to pick up her anchor. Then, shadowy in the fog, she steamed out on the given course. "Yes," he said to his officers, "I let him go.""

The narrator bent forward towards the couch, where no movement

betrayed the presence of a living person.

'Listen,' he said, forcibly. 'That course would lead the Northman straight on a deadly ledge of rock. And the Commanding Officer gave it to him. He steamed out—ran on it—and went down. So he had spoken the truth. He did not know where he was. But it proves nothing. Nothing either way. It may have been the only truth in all his story. And yet ... He seems to have been driven out by a menacing stare—nothing more.'

He abandoned all pretence.

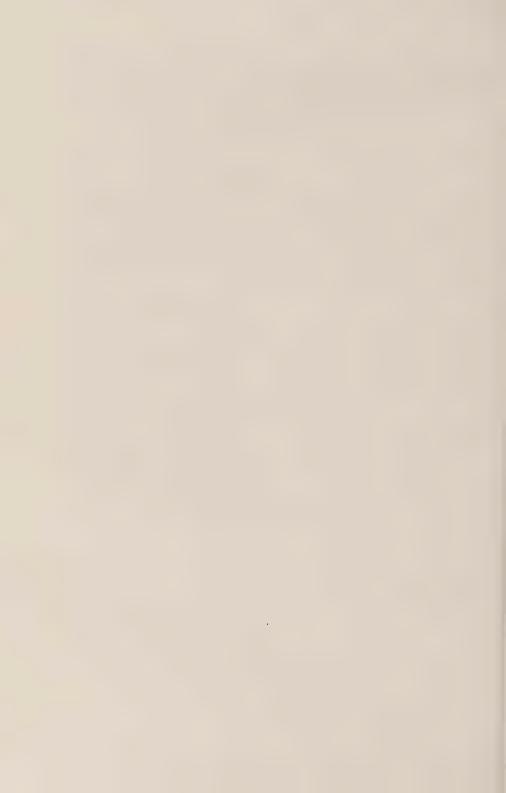
'Yes, I gave that course to him. It seemed to me a supreme test. I believe—no, I don't believe. I don't know. At the time I was certain. They all went down; and I don't know whether I have done stern retribution—or murder; whether I have added to the corpses that litter the bed of the unreadable sea the bodies of men completely innocent or basely guilty. I don't know. I shall never know.'

He rose. The woman on the couch got up and threw her arms round his neck. Her eyes put two gleams in the deep shadow of the room. She knew his passion for truth, his horror of deceit, his humanity.

'Oh, my poor, poor——'

'I shall never know,' he repeated, sternly, disengaged himself, pressed her hands to his lips, and went out.

## The Black Mate



A good many years ago there were several ships loading at the Jetty, London Dock. I am speaking here of the 'eighties of the last century, of the time when London had plenty of fine ships in the docks, though not so many fine buildings in its streets.

The ships at the Jetty were fine enough; they lay one behind the other; and the Sapphire, third from the end, was as good as the rest of them, and nothing more. Each ship at the Jetty had, of course, her chief

officer on board. So had every other ship in dock.

The policeman at the gates knew them all by sight, without being able to say at once, without thinking, to what ship any particular man belonged. As a matter of fact, the mates of the ships then lying in the London Dock were like the majority of officers in the Merchant Service—a steady, hard-working, staunch, unromantic-looking set of men, belonging to various classes of society, but with the professional stamp obliterating the personal characteristics, which were not very marked, anyhow.

This last was true of them all, with the exception of the mate of the Sapphire. Of him the policeman could not be in doubt. This one had a presence.

He was noticeable to them in the street from a great distance; and when in the morning he strode down the Jetty to his ship, the lumpers and the dock labourers rolling the bales and trundling the cases of cargo on their hand-trucks would remark to each other:

'Here's the black mate coming along.'

That was the name they gave him, being a gross lot, who could have no appreciation of the man's dignified bearing. And to call him black was the superficial impressionism of the ignorant.

Of course, Mr Bunter, the mate of the *Sapphire*, was not black. He was no more black than you or I, and certainly as white as any chief mate of a ship in the whole of the Port of London. His complexion was of the sort that did not take the tan easily; and I happen to know that the poor fellow had had a month's illness just before he joined the *Sapphire*.

From this you will perceive that I knew Bunter. Of course I knew him. And, what's more, I knew his secret at the time, this secret which—— Never mind just now. Returning to Bunter's personal appearance, it was nothing but ignorant prejudice on the part of the foreman stevedore to say, as he did in my hearing: 'I bet he's a furriner of some sort.' A man may have black hair without being set down for a

dago. I have known a west-country sailor, boatswain of a fine ship, who looked more Spanish than any Spaniard afloat I've ever met. He looked

like a Spaniard in a picture.

Competent authorities tell us that this earth is to be finally the inheritance of men with dark hair and brown eyes. It seems that already the great majority of mankind is dark-haired in various shades. But it is only when you meet one that you notice how men with really black hair, black as ebony, are rare. Bunter's hair was absolutely black, black as a raven's wing. He wore, too, all his beard (clipped, but a good length all the same), and his eyebrows were thick and bushy. Add to this steely blue eyes, which in a fair-haired man would have been nothing so extraordinary, but in that sombre framing made a startling contrast, and you will easily understand that Bunter was noticeable enough. If it had not been for the quietness of his movements, for the general soberness of his demeanour, one would have given him credit for a fiercely passionate nature.

Of course, he was not in his first youth; but if the expression 'in the force of his age' has any meaning, he realised it completely. He was a tall man, too, though rather spare. Seeing him from his poop indefatigably busy with his duties, Captain Ashton, of the clipper ship Elsinore, lying just ahead of the Sapphire, remarked once to a friend that 'Johns has got

somebody there to hustle his ship along for him.'

Captain Johns, master of the Sapphire, having commanded ships for many years, was well known, without being much respected or liked. In the company of his fellows he was either neglected or chaffed. The chaffing was generally undertaken by Captain Ashton, a cynical and teasing sort of man. It was Captain Ashton who permitted himself the unpleasant joke of proclaiming once in company that 'Johns is of the opinion that every sailor above forty years of age ought to be poisoned—shipmasters in actual command excepted.'

It was in a City restaurant, where several well-known shipmasters were having lunch together. There was Captain Ashton, florid and jovial, in a large white waistcoat and with a yellow rose in his buttonhole; Captain Sellers in a sack-coat, thin and pale-faced, with his iron-grey hair tucked behind his ears, and, but for the absence of spectacles, looking like an ascetical mild man of books; Captain Bell, a bluff sea-dog with hairy fingers, in blue serge and a black felt hat pushed far back off his crimson forehead. There was also a very young shipmaster, with





a little fair moustache and serious eyes, who said nothing, and only smiled faintly from time to time.

Captain Johns, very much startled, raised his perplexed and credulous glance, which, together with a low and horizontally wrinkled brow, did not make a very intellectual ensemble. This impression was by no

means mended by the slightly pointed form of his bald head.

Everybody laughed outright, and, thus guided, Captain Johns ended by smiling rather sourly, and attempted to defend himself. It was all very well to joke, but nowadays, when ships, to pay anything at all, had to be driven hard on the passage and in harbour, the sea was no place for elderly men. Only young men and men in their prime were equal to modern conditions of push and hurry. Look at the great firms: almost every single one of them was getting rid of men showing any signs of age. He, for one, didn't want any oldsters on board his ship.

And, indeed, in this opinion Captain Johns was not singular. There were at that time a lot of seamen, with nothing against them but that they were grizzled, wearing out the soles of their last pair of boots on the pavements of the City in the heart-breaking search for a berth.

Captain Johns added with a sort of ill-humoured innocence that from holding that opinion to thinking of poisoning people was a very

long step.

This seemed final, but Captain Ashton would not let go his joke.

'Oh, yes. I am sure you would. You said distinctly "of no use". What's to be done with men who are "of no use"? You are a kindhearted fellow, Johns. I am sure that if only you thought it over carefully you would consent to have them poisoned in some painless manner.'

Captain Sellers twitched his thin, sinuous lips.

'Make ghosts of them,' he suggested pointedly.

At the mention of ghosts Captain Johns became shy, in his perplexed, sly and unlovely manner.

Captain Ashton winked.

'Yes. And then perhaps you would get a chance to have a communication with the world of spirits. Surely the ghosts of seamen should haunt ships. Some of them would be sure to call on an old shipmate.'

Captain Sellers remarked drily:

'Don't raise his hopes like this, it's cruel. He won't see anything. You know, Johns, that nobody has ever seen a ghost.'

At this intolerable provocation Captain Johns came out of his

reserve. With no perplexity whatever, but with a positive passion of credulity giving momentary lustre to his dull little eyes, he brought up a lot of authenticated instances. There were books and books full of instances. It was merest ignorance to deny supernatural apparitions. Cases were published every month in a special newspaper. Professor Cranks saw ghosts daily. And Professor Cranks was no small potatoes either. One of the biggest scientific men living. And there was that newspaper fellow—what's his name?—who had a girl-ghost visitor. He printed in his paper things she said to him. And to say there were no ghosts after that!

'Why, they have been photographed! What more proof do you

want?'

Captain Johns was indignant. Captain Bell's lips twitched, but Cap-

tain Ashton protested now.

'For goodness' sake don't keep him going with that. And by the by, Johns, who's that hairy pirate you've got for your new mate? Nobody in the Dock seems to have seen him before.'

Captain Johns, pacified by the change of subjects, answered simply that Willy, the tobacconist at the corner of Fenchurch Street, had sent

him along.

Willy, his shop, and the very house in Fenchurch Street, I believe, are gone now. In his time, wearing a care-worn, absent-minded look on his pasty face, Willy served with tobacco many southern-going ships out of the Port of London. At certain times of the day the shop would be full of shipmasters. They sat on casks, they lounged against the counter.

Many a youngster found his first lift in life there; many a man got a sorely needed berth by simply dropping in for four pennyworth of bird's-eye at an auspicious moment. Even Willy's assistant, a redheaded, uninterested, delicate-looking young fellow, would hand you across the counter sometimes a bit of valuable intelligence with your box of cigarettes, in a whisper, lips hardly moving, thus: 'The *Bellona*, South Dock. Second officer wanted. You may be in time for it if you hurry up.'

And didn't one just fly!

'Oh, Willy sent him,' said Captain Ashton. 'He's a very striking man. If you were to put a red sash round his waist and a red handkerchief round his head he would look exactly like one of them buccaneering chaps that made men walk the plank and carried women off into captiv-

ity. Look out, Johns, he don't cut your throat for you and run off with the *Sapphire*. What ship has he come out of last?'

Captain Johns, after looking up credulously as usual, wrinkled his brow, and said placidly that the man had seen better days. His name was Bunter.

'He's had command of a Liverpool ship, the *Samaria*, some years ago. He lost her in the Indian Ocean, and had his certificate suspended for a year. Ever since then he has not been able to get another command. He's been knocking about in the Western ocean trade lately.'

'That accounts for him being a stranger to everybody about the Docks,' Captain Ashton concluded as they rose from table.

Captain Johns walked down to the Dock after lunch. He was short of stature and slightly bandy. His appearance did not inspire the generality of mankind with esteem; but it must have been otherwise with his employers. He had the reputation of being an uncomfortable commander, meticulous in trifles, always nursing a grievance of some sort and incessantly nagging. He was not a man to kick up a row with you and be done with it, but to say nasty things in a whining voice; a man capable of making one's life a perfect misery if he took a dislike to an officer.

That very evening I went to see Bunter on board, and sympathised with him on his prospects for the voyage. He was subdued. I suppose a man with a secret locked up in his breast loses his buoyancy. And there was another reason why I could not expect Bunter to show a great elasticity of spirits. For one thing he had been very seedy lately, and besides—but of that later.

Captain Johns had been on board that afternoon and had loitered and dodged about his chief mate in a manner which had annoyed Bunter exceedingly.

'What could he mean?' he asked with calm exasperation. 'One would think he suspected I had stolen something and tried to see in what pocket I had stowed it away; or that somebody told him I had a tail and he wanted to find out how I managed to conceal it. I don't like to be approached from behind several times in one afternoon in that creepy way and then to be looked up at suddenly in front from under my elbow. Is it a new sort of peep-bo game? It doesn't amuse me. I am no longer a baby.'

I assured him that if anyone were to tell Captain Johns that he— Bunter—had a tail, Johns would manage to get himself to believe the story in some mysterious manner. He would. He was suspicious and credulous to an inconceivable degree. He would believe any silly tale, suspect any man of anything, and crawl about with it and ruminate the stuff, and turn it over and over in his mind in the most miserable, inwardly whining perplexity. He would take the meanest possible view in the end, and discover the meanest possible course of action by a sort of natural genius for that sort of thing.

Bunter also told me that the mean creature had crept all over the ship on his little, bandy legs, taking him along to grumble and whine to about a lot of trifles. Crept about the decks like a wretched insect—like

a cockroach, only not so lively.

Thus did the self-possessed Bunter express himself with great disgust. Then, going on with his usual stately deliberation, made sinister by the frown of his jet-black eyebrows:

'And the fellow is mad, too. He tried to be sociable for a bit, and could find nothing else but to make big eyes at me, and ask me if I believed "in communication beyond the grave". Communication beyond—I didn't know what he meant at first. I didn't know what to say. "A very solemn subject, Mr Bunter," says he. "I've given a great deal of study to it."

Had Johns lived on shore he would have been the predestined prey of fraudulent mediums; or even if he had had any decent opportunities between the voyages. Luckily for him, when in England, he lived somewhere far away in Leytonstone, with a maiden sister ten years older than himself, a fearsome virago twice his size, before whom he trembled. It was said she bullied him terribly in general; and in the particular instance of his spiritualistic leanings she had her own views.

These leanings were to her simply satanic. She was reported as having declared that, 'With God's help, she would prevent that fool from giving himself up to the Devils.' It was beyond doubt that Johns' secret ambition was to get into personal communication with the spirits of the dead—if only his sister would let him. But she was adamant. I was told that while in London he had to account to her for every penny of the money he took with him in the morning, and for every hour of his time. And she kept the bank-book, too.

Bunter (he had been a wild youngster, but he was well connected; had ancestors; there was a family tomb somewhere in the Home Counties)—Bunter was indignant, perhaps on account of his own dead.

Those steely blue eyes of his flashed with positive ferocity out of that black-bearded face. He impressed me—there was so much dark passion in his leisurely contempt.

'The cheek of the fellow! Enter into relations with . . . A mean little cad like this! It would be an impudent intrusion. He wants to enter? . . . What is it? A new sort of snobbishness or what?'

I laughed outright at this original view of spiritism—or whatever the ghost craze is called. Even Bunter himself condescended to smile. But it was an austere, quickly vanished smile. A man in his almost, I may say, tragic position couldn't be expected—you understand. He was really worried. He was ready eventually to put up with any dirty trick in the course of the voyage. A man could not expect much consideration should he find himself at the mercy of a fellow like Johns. A misfortune is a misfortune, and there's an end of it. But to be bored by mean, low-spirited, inane ghost stories in the Johns style, all the way out to Calcutta and back again, was an intolerable apprehension to be under. Spiritism was indeed a solemn subject to think about in that light. Dreadful even!

Poor fellow! Little we both thought that before very long he himself... However, I could give him no comfort. I was rather appalled myself.

Bunter had also another annoyance that day. A confounded berthing master came on board on some pretence or other, but in reality, Bunter thought, simply impelled by an inconvenient curiosity—inconvenient to Bunter, that is. After some beating about the bush, that man suddenly said:

'I can't help thinking. I've seen you before somewhere, Mr Mate. If I heard your name, perhaps——'

Bunter—that's the worst of a life with a mystery in it—was much alarmed. It was very likely that the man had seen him before—worse luck to his excellent memory. Bunter himself could not be expected to remember every casual dock walloper he might have had to do with. Bunter brazened it out by turning upon the man, making use of that impressive, black-as-night sternness of expression his unusual hair furnished him with:

'My name's Bunter, sir. Does that enlighten your inquisitive intellect? And I don't ask what your name may be. I don't want to know. I've no use for it, sir. An individual who calmly tells me to my face that

he is not sure if he has seen me before, either means to be impudent or is no better than a worm, sir. Yes, I said a worm—a blind worm!'

Brave Bunter. That was the line to take. He fairly drove the beggar out of the ship, as if every word had been a blow. But the pertinacity of that brass-bound Paul Pry was astonishing. He cleared out of the ship, of course, before Bunter's ire, not saying anything, and only trying to cover up his retreat by a sickly smile. But once on the Jetty he turned deliberately round, and set himself to stare in dead earnest at the ship. He remained planted there like a mooring-post, absolutely motionless, and with his stupid eyes winking no more than a pair of cabin port-holes.

What could Bunter do? It was awkward for him, you know. He could not go and put his head into the bread-locker. What he did was to take up a position abaft the mizzen rigging, and stare back as unwinking as the other. So they remained, and I don't know which of them grew giddy first; but the man on the Jetty, not having the advantage of something to hold on to, got tired the soonest, flung his arm, giving the con-

test up, as it were, and went away at last.

Bunter told me he was glad the *Sapphire*, 'that gem amongst ships' as he alluded to her sarcastically, was going to sea next day. He had had enough of the Dock. I understood his impatience. He had steeled himself against any possible worry the voyage might bring, though it is clear enough now that he was not prepared for the extraordinary experience that was awaiting him already, and in no other part of the world than the Indian Ocean itself; the very part of the world where the poor fellow had lost his ship and had broken his luck, as it seemed for good and all, at the same time.

As to his remorse in regard to a certain secret action of his life, well, I understand that a man of Bunter's fine character would suffer not a little. Still, between ourselves, and without the slightest wish to be cynical, it cannot be denied that with the noblest of us the fear of being found out enters for some considerable part into the composition of remorse. I didn't say this in so many words to Bunter, but, as the poor fellow harped a bit on it, I told him that there were skeletons in a good many honest cupboards, and that, as to his own particular guilt, it wasn't writ large on his face for everybody to see—so he needn't worry as to that. And besides, he would be gone to sea in about twelve hours from now.

He said there was some comfort in that thought, and went off then

to spend his last evening for many months with his wife. For all his wildness, Bunter had made no mistake in his marrying. He had married a lady. A perfect lady. She was a dear little woman, too. As to her pluck, I, who know what times they had to go through, I cannot admire her enough for it. Real, hard-wearing everyday and day-after-day pluck that only a woman is capable of when she is of the right sort—the undismayed sort I would call it.

The black mate felt this parting with his wife more than any of the previous ones in all the years of bad luck. But she was of the undismayed kind, and showed less trouble in her gentle face than the black-haired, buccaneer-like, but dignified mate of the *Sapphire*. It may be that her conscience was less disturbed than her husband's. Of course, his life had no secret places for her; but a woman's conscience is somewhat more resourceful in finding good and valid excuses. It depends greatly on the person that needs them, too.

They had agreed that she should not come down to the Dock to see him off. 'I wonder you care to look at me at all,' said the sensitive man. And she did not laugh.

Bunter was very sensitive; he left her rather brusquely at the last. He got on board in good time, and produced the usual impression on the mud-pilot in the broken-down straw hat who took the Sapphire out of dock. The river-man was very polite to the dignified striking-looking chief mate. 'The fine-inch manilla for the check-rope, Mr—Bunter, thank you-Mr Bunter, please.' The sea-pilot who left the 'gem of ships' heading comfortably down-Channel off Dover told some of his friends that, this voyage, the Sapphire had for chief mate a man who seemed a jolly sight too good for old Johns. 'Bunter's his name. I wonder where he's sprung from? Never seen him before in any ship I piloted in or out all these years. He's the sort of man you don't forget. You couldn't. A thorough good sailor, too. And won't old Johns just worry his head off! Unless the old fool should take fright at him-for he does not seem the sort of man that would let himself be put upon without letting you know what he thinks of you. And that's exactly what old Johns would be more afraid of than of anything else.'

As this is really meant to be the record of a spiritualistic experience which came, if not precisely to Captain Johns himself, at any rate to his ship, there is no use in recording the other events of the passage out. It was an ordinary passage; the crew was an ordinary crew, the weather

was of the usual kind. The black mate's quiet, sedate method of going to work had given a sober tone to the life of the ship. Even in gales of

wind everything went on quietly somehow.

There was only one severe blow which made things fairly lively for all hands for full four-and-twenty hours. That was off the coast of Africa, after passing the Cape of Good Hope. At the very height of it several heavy seas were shipped with no serious results, but there was a considerable smashing of breakable objects in the pantry and in the staterooms. Mr Bunter, who was so greatly respected on board, found himself treated scurvily by the Southern Ocean, which, bursting open the door of his room like a ruffianly burglar, carried off several useful things, and made all the others extremely wet.

Later, on the same day, the Southern Ocean caused the Sapphire to lurch over in such an unrestrained fashion that the two drawers fitted under Mr Bunter's sleeping-berth flew out altogether, spilling all their contents. They ought, of course, to have been locked, and Mr Bunter had only to thank himself for what had happened. He ought to have

turned the key on each before going out on deck.

His consternation was very great. The steward, who was paddling about all the time with swabs, trying to dry out the flooded cuddy, heard him exclaim 'Hallo!' in a startled and dismayed tone. In the midst of his work the steward felt a sympathetic concern for the mate's distress.

Captain Johns was secretly glad when he heard of the damage. He was indeed afraid of his chief mate, as the sea-pilot had ventured to foretell, and afraid of him for the very reason the sea-pilot had put forward as likely.

Captain Johns, therefore, would have liked very much to hold that black mate of his at his mercy in some way or other. But the man was irreproachable, as near absolute perfection as could be. And Captain Johns was much annoyed, and at the same time congratulated himself on his chief officer's efficiency.

He made a great show of living sociably with him, on the principle that the more friendly you are with a man the more easily you may catch him tripping; and also for the reason that he wanted to have somebody who would listen to his stories of manifestations, apparitions, ghosts, and all the rest of the imbecile spook-lore. He had it all at his fingers' ends; and he spun those ghostly yarns in a persistent, colourless voice, giving them a futile turn peculiarly his own.

'I like to converse with my officers,' he used to say. 'There are masters that hardly ever open their mouths from beginning to end of a passage for fear of losing their dignity. What's that after all—this bit of position a man holds!'

His sociability was most to be dreaded in the second dog-watch, because he was one of those men who grow lively towards the evening, and the officer on duty was unable then to find excuses for leaving the poop. Captain Johns would pop up the companion suddenly, and, sidling up in his creeping way to poor Bunter, as he walked up and down, would fire into him some spiritualistic proposition, such as:

'Spirits, male and female, show a good deal of refinement in a gen-

eral way, don't they?'

To which Bunter, holding his black-whiskered head high, would mutter:

'I don't know.'

'Ah! that's because you don't want to. You are the most obstinate, prejudiced man I've ever met, Mr Bunter. I told you you may have any book out of my bookcase. You may just go into my stateroom, and help yourself to any volume.'

And if Bunter protested that he was too tired in his watches below to spare any time for reading, Captain Johns would smile nastily behind his back, and remark that of course some people needed more sleep than others to keep themselves fit for their work. If Mr Bunter was afraid of not keeping properly awake when on duty at night, that was another matter.

'But I think you borrowed a novel to read from the second mate the other day—a trashy pack of lies,' Captain Johns sighed. 'I am afraid you are not a spiritually minded man, Mr Bunter. That's what's the matter.'

Sometimes he would appear on deck in the middle of the night, looking very grotesque and bandy-legged in his sleeping-suit. At that sight the persecuted Bunter would wring his hands stealthily, and break out into moisture all over his forehead. After standing sleepily by the binnacle, scratching himself in an unpleasant manner, Captain Johns was sure to start on some aspect or other of his only topic.

He would, for instance, discourse on the improvement of morality to be expected from the establishment of general and close intercourse with the spirits of the departed. The spirits, Captain Johns thought, would consent to associate familiarly with the living if it were not for the unbelief of the great mass of mankind. He himself would not care to have anything to do with a crowd that would not believe in his—Captain Johns'—existence. Then why should a spirit? This was asking too much.

He went on breathing hard by the binnacle and trying to reach round his shoulder-blades; then, with a thick, drowsy severity, declared:

'Incredulity, sir, is the evil of the age!'

It rejected the evidence of Professor Cranks and of the journalist

chap. It resisted the production of photographs.

For Captain Johns believed firmly that certain spirits had been photographed. He had read something of it in the papers. And the idea of it having been done had got a tremendous hold on him, because his mind was not critical. Bunter said afterwards that nothing could be more weird than this little man, swathed in a sleeping-suit three sizes too large for him, shuffling with excitement in the moonlight near the wheel, and shaking his fist at the serene sea.

'Photographs! photographs!' he would repeat, in a voice as creaky as

a rusty hinge.

The very helmsman just behind him got uneasy at that performance, not being capable of understanding exactly what the 'old man was kicking up a row with the mate about'.

Then Johns, after calming down a bit, would begin again.

'Then sensitised plate can't lie. No, sir.'

Nothing could be more funny than this ridiculous little man's conviction—his dogmatic tone. Bunter would go on swinging up and down the poop like a deliberate, dignified pendulum. He said not a word. But the poor fellow had not a trifle on his conscience, as you know; and to have imbecile ghosts rammed down his throat like this on top of his own worry nearly drove him crazy. He knew that on many occasions he was on the verge of lunacy because he could not help indulging in half-delirious visions of Captain Johns being picked up by the scruff of the neck and dropped over the taffrail into the ship's wake—the sort of thing no sane sailorman would think of doing to a cat or any other animal, anyhow. He imagined him bobbing up—a tiny black speck left far astern on the moonlit ocean.

I don't think that even at the worst moments Bunter really desired to drown Captain Johns. I fancy that all his disordered imagination longed for was merely to stop the ghostly inanity of the skipper's talk.

But, all the same, it was a dangerous form of self-indulgence. Just picture to yourself that ship in the Indian Ocean, on a clear, tropical night, with her sails full and still, the watch on deck stowed away out of sight; and on her poop, flooded with moonlight, the stately black mate walking up and down with measured, dignified steps, preserving an awful silence, and that grotesquely mean little figure in striped flannelette alternately creaking and droning of 'personal intercourse beyond the grave'.

It makes me creepy all over to think of. And sometimes the folly of Captain Johns would appear clothed in a sort of weird utilitarianism. How useful it would be if the spirits of the departed could be induced to take a practical interest in the affairs of the living! What a help, say, to the police, for instance, in the detection of crime! The number of murders, at any rate, would be considerably reduced, he guessed, with an air of great sagacity. Then he would give way to grotesque discouragement.

Where was the use of trying to communicate with people that had no faith, and more likely than not would scorn the offered information? Spirits had their feelings. They were all feelings in a way. But he was surprised at the forbearance shown towards murderers by their victims. That was the sort of apparition that no guilty man would dare to pooh-pooh. And perhaps the undiscovered murderers—whether believing or not—were haunted. They wouldn't be likely to boast about it, would they?

'For myself,' he pursued, in a sort of vindictive, malevolent whine, 'if anybody murdered me I would not let him forget it. I would wither him up—I would terrify him to death.'

The idea of his skipper's ghost terrifying anyone was so ludicrous that the black mate, little disposed to mirth as he was, could not help giving vent to a weary laugh. And this laugh, the only acknowledgement of a long and earnest discourse, offended Captain Johns.

'What's there to laugh at in this conceited manner, Mr Bunter?' he snarled. 'Supernatural visitations have terrified better men than you. Don't you allow me enough soul to make a ghost of?'

I think it was the nasty tone that caused Bunter to stop short and turn about.

'I shouldn't wonder', went on the angry fanatic of spiritism, 'if you weren't one of them people that take no more account of a man than

if he were a beast. You would be capable, I don't doubt, to deny the possession of an immortal soul to your own father.'

And then Bunter, being bored beyond endurance, and also exasper-

ated by the private worry, lost his self-possession.

He walked up suddenly to Captain Johns, and, stooping a little to look close into his face, said, in a low, even tone:

'You don't know what a man like me is capable of.'

Captain Johns threw his head back, but was too astonished to budge. Bunter resumed his walk; and for a long time his measured footsteps and the low wash of the water alongside were the only sounds which troubled the silence brooding over the great waters. Then Captain Johns cleared his throat uneasily, and, after sidling away towards the companion for greater safety, plucked up enough to retreat under an act of authority:

'Raise the starboard clew of the mainsail, and lay the yards dead

square, Mr Bunter. Don't you see the wind is nearly right aft?'

Bunter at once answered 'Ay, ay, sir,' though there was not the slightest necessity to touch the yards, and the wind was well out on the quarter. While he was executing the order Captain Johns hung on the companion-steps, growling to himself: 'Walk this poop like an admiral, and don't even notice when the yards want trimming!'—loud enough for the helmsman to overhear. Then he sank slowly backwards out of the man's sight; and when he reached the bottom of the stairs he stood still and thought.

'He's an awful ruffian, with all his gentlemanly airs. No more gentleman mates for me.'

Two nights afterwards he was slumbering peacefully in his berth, when a heavy thumping just above his head (a well-understood signal that he was wanted on deck) made him leap out of bed, broad awake in a moment.

'What's up?' he muttered, running out barefooted. On passing through the cabin he glanced at the clock. It was the middle watch. 'What on earth can the mate want me for?' he thought.

Bolting out of the companion, he found a clear, dewy moonlit night and a strong, steady breeze. He looked around wildly. There was no one on the poop except the helmsman, who addressed him at once.

'It was me, sir. I let go the wheel for a second to stamp over your head. I am afraid there's something wrong with the mate.'

'Where's he got to?' asked the captain sharply.

The man, who was obviously nervous, said:

'The last I saw of him was as he fell down the port poop ladder.'

'Fell down the poop ladder! What did he do that for? What made him?'

'I don't know, sir. He was walking the port side. Then just as he turned towards me to come aft...'

'You saw him,' interrupted the captain.

'I did. I was looking at him. And I heard the crash, too—something awful. Like the mainmast going overboard. It was as if something had struck him.'

Captain Johns became very uneasy and alarmed.

'Come,' he said sharply. 'Did anybody strike him? What did you see?'

'Nothing, sir, so help me! There was nothing to see. He just gave a little sort of hallo! threw his hands before him, and over he went—crash. I couldn't hear anything more, so I just let go the wheel for a second to call you up.'

'You're scared!' said Captain Johns.

'I am, sir, straight!'

Captain Johns stared at him. The silence of his ship driving on her way seemed to contain a danger—a mystery. He was reluctant to go and look for his mate himself, in the shadows of the main deck, so quiet, so still.

All he did was to advance to the break of the poop, and call for the watch. As the sleepy men came trooping aft, he shouted to them fiercely.

'Look at the foot of the port poop ladder, some of you! See the mate lying there?'

Their startled exclamations told him immediately that they did see him. Somebody even screeched out emotionally:

'He's dead!'

Mr Bunter was laid in his bunk and when the lamp in his room was lit he looked indeed as if he were dead, but it was obvious also that he was breathing yet. The steward had been roused out, the second mate called and sent on deck to look after the ship, and for an hour or so Captain Johns devoted himself silently to the restoring of consciousness. Mr Bunter at last opened his eyes, but he could not speak. He was dazed and inert. The steward bandaged a nasty scalp-wound while Captain

Johns held an additional light. They had to cut away a lot of Mr Bunter's jet-black hair to make a good dressing. This done, and after gazing for a while at their patient, the two left the cabin.

'A rum go, this, steward,' said Captain Johns in the passage.

'Yessir.'

'A sober man that's right in his head does not fall down a poop ladder like a sack of potatoes. The ship's as steady as a church.'

'Yessir. Fit of some kind, I shouldn't wonder.'

'Well, I should. He doesn't look as if he were subject to fits and giddiness. Why, the man's in the prime of life. I wouldn't have another kind of mate—not if I knew it. You don't think he has a private store of liquor, do you, eh? He seemed to me a bit strange in his manner several times lately. Off his feed too a bit, I noticed.'

'Well, sir, if he ever had a bottle or two of grog in his cabin, that must have gone a long time ago. I saw him throw some broken glass overboard after the last gale we had; but that didn't amount to anything.

Anyway, sir, you couldn't call Mr Bunter a drinking man.'

'No,' conceded the captain reflectively. And the steward, locking the pantry door, tried to escape out of the passage, thinking he could manage to snatch another hour of sleep before it was time for him to turn out for the day.

Captain Johns shook his head. 'There's some mystery there.'

'There's special providence that he didn't crack his head like an eggshell on the quarterdeck mooring-bits, sir. The men tell me he couldn't have missed them by more than an inch.'

And the steward vanished skilfully.

Captain Johns spent the rest of the night and the whole of the ensuing day between his own room and that of the mate.

In his own room he sat with his open hands reposing on his knees, his lips pursed up, and the horizontal furrows on his forehead marked very heavily. Now and then raising his arm by a slow, as if cautious movement, he scratched lightly the top of his bald head. In the mate's room he stood for long periods of time with his hand to his lips, gazing at the half-conscious man.

For three days Mr Bunter did not say a single word. He looked at people sensibly enough but did not seem to be able to hear any questions put to him. They cut off some more of his hair and swathed his head in wet cloths. He took some nourishment, and was made as comfortable as possible. At dinner on the third day the second mate remarked to the captain, in connection with the affair:

'These half-round brass plates on the steps of the poop ladders are

beastly dangerous things!'

'Are they?' retorted Captain Johns sourly. 'It takes more than a brass plate to account for an able-bodied man crashing down in this fashion like a felled ox.'

The second mate was impressed by that view. There was something in that, he thought.

'And the weather fine, everything dry, and the ship going along as

steady as a church!' pursued Captain Johns gruffly.

As Captain Johns continued to look extremely sour, the second mate did not open his lips any more during the dinner. Captain Johns was annoyed and hurt by an innocent remark, because the fitting of the aforesaid brass plates had been done at his suggestion only the voyage before, in order to smarten up the appearance of the poop ladders.

On the fourth day Mr Bunter looked decidedly better; very languid yet, of course, but he heard and understood what was said to him, and

even could say a few words in a feeble voice.

Captain Johns, coming in, contemplated him attentively, without much visible sympathy.

'Well, can you give us your account of this accident, Mr Bunter?'

Bunter moved slightly his bandaged head, and fixed his cold, blue stare on Captain Johns' face, as if taking stock and appraising the value of every feature; the perplexed forehead, the credulous eyes, the inane droop of the mouth. And he gazed so long that Captain Johns grew restive, and looked over his shoulder at the door.

'No accident,' breathed out Bunter, in a peculiar tone.

'You don't mean to say you've got the falling sickness,' said Captain Johns. 'How would you call it signing as chief mate of a clipper ship with a thing like that on you?'

Bunter answered him only by a sinister look. The skipper shuffled

his feet a little.

'Well, what made you have that tumble, then?'

Bunter raised himself a little, and, looking straight into Captain Johns' eyes, said, in a very distinct whisper:

'You-were-right!'

He fell back and closed his eyes. Not a word more could Captain Johns get out of him; and, the steward coming into the cabin, the skip-

per withdrew.

But that very night, unobserved, Captain Johns, opening the door cautiously, entered again the mate's cabin. He could wait no longer. The suppressed eagerness, the excitement expressed in all his mean, creeping little person, did not escape the chief mate, who was lying awake, looking frightfully pulled down and perfectly impassive.

'You are coming to gloat over me, I suppose,' said Bunter, without

moving and yet making a palpable hit.

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Captain Johns with a start, and assuming a sobered demeanour. 'There's a thing to say!'

'Well, gloat, then! You and your ghosts, you've managed to get over a live man.'

This was said by Bunter without stirring, in a low voice, and with not much expression.

'Do you mean to say', enquired Captain Johns, in awe-struck whisper, 'that you had a supernatural experience that night? You saw an

apparition, then, on board my ship?'

Reluctance, shame, disgust, would have been visible on poor Bunter's countenance if the great part of it had not been swathed up in cotton wool and bandages. His ebony eyebrows, more sinister than ever amongst all that lot of white linen, came together in a frown as he made a mighty effort to say:

'Yes, I have seen.'

The wretchedness in his eyes would have awakened the compassion of any other man than Captain Johns. But Captain Johns was all agog with triumphant excitement. He was just a little bit frightened too. He looked at that unbelieving scoffer laid low, and did not even dimly guess at his profound, humiliating distress. He was not generally capable of taking much part in the anguish of his fellow creatures. This time, moreover, he was excessively anxious to know what had happened. Fixing his credulous eyes on the bandaged head, he asked, trembling slightly:

'And did it—did it knock you down?'

'Come! am I the sort of man to be knocked down by a ghost?' protested Bunter in a little stronger tone. 'Don't you remember what you said yourself the other night? Better men than me—— Ha! you'll

have to look a long time before you find a better man for a mate of your ship.'

Captain Johns pointed a solemn finger at Bunter's bed-place.

'You've been terrified,' he said. 'That's what's the matter. You've been terrified. Why, even the man at the wheel was scared, though he couldn't see anything. He *felt* the supernatural. You are punished for your incredulity, Mr Bunter. You were terrified.'

'And suppose I was,' said Bunter. 'Do you know what I had seen? Can you conceive the sort of ghost that would haunt a man like me? Do you think it was a ladyish, afternoon call, another-cup-of-tea-please apparition that visits your Professor Cranks and that journalist chap you are always talking about? No; I can't tell you what it was like. Every man has his own ghosts. You couldn't conceive...'

Bunter stopped, out of breath; and Captain Johns remarked, with

the glow of inward satisfaction reflected in his tone:

'I've always thought you were the sort of man that was ready for anything; from pitch-and-toss to wilful murder, as the saying goes. Well, well! So you were terrified.'

'I stepped back,' said Bunter curtly. 'I don't remember anything else.'

'The man at the wheel told me you went backwards as if something had hit you.'

'It was a sort of inward blow,' explained Bunter. 'Something too deep for you, Captain Johns, to understand. Your life and mine haven't been the same. Aren't you satisfied to see me converted?'

'And you can't tell me any more?' asked Captain Johns anxiously.

'No, I can't. I wouldn't. It would be no use if I did. That sort of experience must be gone through. Say I am being punished. Well, I take my punishment, but talk of it I won't.'

'Very well,' said Captain Johns; 'you won't. But, mind, I can draw

my own conclusions from that.'

'Draw what you like; but be careful what you say, sir. You don't terrify me. You aren't a ghost.'

'One word. Has it any connection with what you said to me on that last night, when we had a talk together on spiritualism?'

Bunter looked weary and puzzled.

'What did I say?'

'You told me that I couldn't know what a man like you was capable of.'

'Yes, yes. Enough!'

'Very good. I am fixed, then,' remarked Captain Johns. 'All I say is that I am jolly glad not to be you, though I would have given almost anything for the privilege of personal communication with the world of spirits. Yes, sir, but not in that way.'

Poor Bunter moaned pitifully.

'It has made me feel twenty years older.'

Captain Johns retired quietly. He was delighted to observe this overbearing ruffian humbled to the dust by the moralising agency of the spirits. The whole occurrence was a source of pride and gratification; and he began to feel a sort of regard for his chief mate. It is true that in further interviews Bunter showed himself very mild and deferential. He seemed to cling to his captain for spiritual protection. He used to send for him, and say, 'I feel so nervous,' and Captain Johns would stay patiently for hours in the hot little cabin, and feel proud of the call.

For Mr Bunter was ill, and could not leave his berth for a good many days. He became a convinced spiritualist, not enthusiastically—that could hardly have been expected from him—but in a grim, unshakable way. He could not be called exactly friendly to the disembodied inhabitants of our globe as Captain Johns was. But he was now a firm, if

gloomy, recruit of spiritualism.

One afternoon, as the ship was already well to the north in the Gulf of Bengal, the steward knocked at the door of the captain's cabin, and said, without opening it:

'The mate asks if you could spare him a moment, sir. He seems to be

in a state in there.'

Captain Johns jumped up from the couch at once.

'Yes. Tell him I am coming.'

He thought: Could it be possible there had been another spiritual manifestation—in the daytime, too!

He revelled in the hope. It was not exactly that, however. Still, Bunter, whom he saw sitting collapsed in a chair—he had been up for several days, but not on deck as yet—poor Bunter had something startling enough to communicate. His hands covered his face. His legs were stretched straight out, dismally.

'What's the news now?' croaked Captain Johns, not unkindly, because in truth it always pleased him to see Bunter—as he expressed it—tamed.

'News!' exclaimed the crushed sceptic through his hands. 'Ay, news enough, Captain Johns. Who will be able to deny the awfulness, the genuineness? Another man would have dropped dead. You want to know what I had seen. All I can tell you is that since I've seen it my hair is turning white.'

Bunter detached his hands from his face, and they hung on each side of his chair as if dead. He looked broken in the dusky cabin.

'You don't say!' stammered out Captain Johns. 'Turned white! Hold on a bit! I'll light the lamp!'

When the lamp was lit, the startling phenomenon could be seen plainly enough. As if the dread, the horror, the anguish of the supernatural were being exhaled through the pores of his skin, a sort of silvery mist seemed to cling to the cheeks and the head of the mate. His short beard, his cropped hair, were growing not black, but grey—almost white.

When Mr Bunter, thin-faced and shaky, came on deck for duty, he was clean-shaven, and his head was white. The hands were awe-struck. 'Another man,' they whispered to each other. It was generally and mysteriously agreed that the mate had 'seen something', with the exception of the man at the wheel at the time, who maintained that the mate was 'struck by something'.

This distinction hardly amounted to a difference. On the other hand, everybody admitted that, after he picked up his strength a bit, he seemed even smarter in his movements than before.

One day in Calcutta, Captain Johns, pointing out to a visitor his white-headed chief mate standing by the main hatch, was heard to say oracularly:

'That man's in the prime of life.'

Of course, while Bunter was away, I called regularly on Mrs Bunter every Saturday, just to see whether she had any use for my services. It was understood I would do that. She had just his half-pay to live on—it amounted to about a pound a week. She had taken one room in a quiet little square in the East End.

And this was affluence to what I had heard that the couple were reduced to for a time after Bunter had to give up the Western ocean trade—he used to go as mate of all sorts of hard packets after he lost his ship and his luck together—it was affluence to that time when Bunter

would start at seven o'clock in the morning with but a glass of hot water and a crust of dry bread.

It won't stand thinking about, especially for those who know Mrs Bunter. I have seen something of them, too, at that time; and it just makes me shudder to remember what that born lady had to put up with. Enough!

Dear Mrs Bunter used to worry a good deal after the Sapphire left for Calcutta. She would say to me: 'It must be so awful for poor Winston'-Winston is Bunter's name-and I tried to comfort her the best I could. Afterwards, she got some small children to teach in a family, and was half the day with them, and the occupation was good for her.

In the very first letter she had from Calcutta, Bunter told her he had had a fall down the poop ladder, and cut his head, but no bones broken, thank God. That was all. Of course, she had other letters from him, but that vagabond Bunter never gave me a scratch of the pen the solid eleven months. I supposed, naturally, that everything was going on all right. Who could imagine what was happening.

Then one day dear Mrs Bunter got a letter from a legal firm in the City, advising her that her uncle was dead—her old curmudgeon of an uncle—a retired stockbroker, a heartless, petrified antiquity that had lasted on and on. He was nearly ninety, I believe; and if I were to meet his venerable ghost this minute, I would try to take him by the throat

and strangle him.

The old beast would never forgive his niece for marrying Bunter; and years afterwards, when people made a point of letting him know that she was in London, pretty nearly starving at forty years of age, he only said: 'Serve the little fool right!' I believe he meant her to starve. And, lo and behold, the old cannibal died intestate, with no other relatives but that very identical little fool. The Bunters were wealthy people now.

Of course, Mrs Bunter wept as if her heart would break. In any other woman it would have been mere hypocrisy. Naturally, too, she wanted to cable the news to her Winston in Calcutta, but I showed her, Gazette in hand, that the ship was on the homeward-bound list for more than a week already. So we sat down to wait, and talked meantime of dear old Winston every day. There were just one hundred such days before the Sapphire got reported 'All well,' in the chops of the Channel by an incoming mail-boat.

'I am going to Dunkirk to meet him,' says she. The Sapphire had a cargo of jute for Dunkirk. Of course, I had to escort the dear lady in the quality of her 'ingenious friend'. She calls me 'our ingenious friend' to this day; and I've observed some people—strangers—looking hard at me, for the signs of the ingenuity, I suppose.

After settling Mrs Bunter in a good hotel in Dunkirk, I walked down to the docks—late afternoon it was—and what was my surprise to see the ship actually fast alongside. Either Johns or Bunter, or both, must have been driving her hard up-Channel. Anyway, she had been in since the day before last, and her crew was already paid off. I met two of her apprenticed boys going off home on leave with their dunnage on a Frenchman's barrow, as happy as larks, and I asked them if the mate was on board.

'There he is, on the quay, looking at the moorings,' says one of the

youngsters as he skipped past me.

You may imagine the shock to my feelings when I beheld his white head. I could only manage to tell him that his wife was at an hotel in town. He left me at once, to go and get his hat on board. I was mightily surprised by the smartness of his movements as he hurried up the gangway.

Whereas the black mate struck people as deliberate, and strangely stately in his gait for a man in the prime of life, this white-headed chap seemed the most wonderfully alert of old men. I don't suppose Bunter was any quicker on his pins than before. It was the colour of the hair

that made all the difference in one's judgement.

The same with his eyes. Those eyes, that looked at you so steely, so fierce, and so fascinating out of a bush of a buccaneer's black hair, now had an innocent, almost boyish expression in their good-humoured brightness under those white eyebrows.

I led him without any delay into Mrs Bunter's private sitting-room. After she had dropped a tear over the late cannibal, given a hug to her Winston, and told him that he must grow his moustache again, the dear lady tucked her feet upon the sofa, and I got out of Bunter's way.

He started at once to pace the room, waving his long arms. He worked himself into a regular frenzy, and tore Johns limb from limb many times over that evening.

'Fell down? Of course I fell down, by slipping backwards on that fool's patent brass plates. 'Pon my word, I had been walking that poop

in charge of the ship, and I didn't know whether I was in the Indian Ocean or in the moon. I was crazy. My head spun round and round with sheer worry. I had made my last application of your chemist's wonderful stuff.' (This to me.) 'All the store of bottles you gave me got smashed when those drawers fell out in the last gale. I had been getting some dry things to change, when I heard the cry: "All hands on deck!" and made one jump of it, without even pushing them in properly. Ass! When I came back and saw the broken glass and the mess, I felt ready to faint.

'No; look here—deception is bad; but not to be able to keep it up after one has been forced into it. You know that since I've been squeezed out of the Western ocean packets by younger men, just on account of my grizzled muzzle—you know how much chance I had to ever get a ship. And not a soul to turn to. We have been a lonely couple, we two—she threw away everything for me—and to see her want a piece of dry bread——'

He banged with his fist fit to split the Frenchman's table in two.

'I would have turned a sanguinary pirate for her, let alone cheating my way into a berth by dyeing my hair. So when you came to me with your chemist's wonderful stuff——'

He checked himself.

'By the by, that fellow's got a fortune when he likes to pick it up. It is a wonderful stuff—you tell him salt water can do nothing to it. It stays on as long as your hair will.'

'All right,' I said. 'Go on.'

Thereupon he went for Johns again with a fury that frightened his wife, and made me laugh till I cried.

'Just you try to think what it would have meant to be at the mercy of the meanest creature that ever commanded a ship! Just fancy what a life that crawling Johns would have led me! And I knew that in a week or so the white hair would begin to show. And the crew. Did you ever think of that? To be shown up as a low fraud before all hands. What a life for me till we got to Calcutta! And once there—kicked out, of course. Halfpay stopped. Annie here alone without a penny—starving; and I on the other side of the earth, ditto. You see?

'I thought of shaving twice a day. But could I shave my head, too? No way—no way at all. Unless I dropped Johns overboard; and even then— Do you wonder now that with all these things boiling in my

head I didn't know where I was putting down my foot that night? I just felt myself falling—then crash, and all dark.

'When I came to myself that bang on the head seemed to have steadied my wits somehow. I was so sick of everything that for two days I wouldn't speak to anyone. They thought it was a slight concussion of the brain. Then the idea dawned upon me as I was looking at that ghost-ridden, wretched fool: "Ah, you love ghosts," I thought. "Well, you shall have something from beyond the grave."

'I didn't even trouble to invent a story. I couldn't imagine a ghost if I wanted to. I wasn't fit to lie connectedly if I had tried. I just bulled him on to it. Do you know, he got, quite by himself, a notion that at some time or other I had done somebody to death in some way, and that——'

'Oh, the horrible man!' cried Mrs Bunter from the sofa. There was a silence.

'And didn't he bore my head off on the home passage!' began Bunter again in a weary voice. 'He loved me. He was proud of me. I was converted. I had had a manifestation. Do you know what he was after? He wanted me and him "to make a séance", in his own words, and to try to call up that ghost (the one that had turned my hair white—the ghost of my supposed victim), and, as he said, talk it over with him—the ghost—in a friendly way.

"Or else, Bunter," he says, "you may get another manifestation when you least expect it, and tumble overboard perhaps, or something. You ain't really safe till we pacify the spirit-world in some way."

'Can you conceive a lunatic like that? No—say?'

I said nothing. But Mrs Bunter did, in a very decided tone.

'Winston, I don't want you to go on board that ship again any more.'

'My dear,' says he, 'I have all my things on board yet.'

'You don't want the things. Don't go near that ship at all.'

He stood still; then, dropping his eyes with a faint smile, said slowly, in a dreamy voice:

'The haunted ship.'

'And your last,' I added.

We carried him off, as he stood, by the night train. He was very quiet; but crossing the Channel, as we two had a smoke on deck, he turned to me suddenly, and, grinding his teeth, whispered:

'He'll never know how near he was being dropped overboard!' He meant Captain Johns. I said nothing.

But Captain Johns, I understand, made a great to-do about the disappearance of his chief mate. He set the French police scouring the country for the body. In the end, I fancy he got word from his owners' office to drop all this fuss—that it was all right. I don't suppose he ever understood anything of that mysterious occurrence.

To this day he tries at times (he's retired now, and his conversation is not very coherent), he tries to tell the story of a black mate he once had, 'a murderous, gentlemanly ruffian, with raven-black hair which turned white all at once in consequence of a manifestation from beyond the grave.' An avenging apparition. What with reference to black and white hair, to poop ladders, and to his own feelings and views, it is difficult to make head or tail of it. If his sister (she's very vigorous still) should be present she cuts all this short—peremptorily:

'Don't you mind what he says. He's got devils on the brain.'







